

The basics:

1. Western snowy plovers and people co-exist now on the south coast. No plovers currently nest on the north coast, but they used to.
2. Normally, if plovers started nesting on a new beach, it would probably have to be closed to people because it's federally protected as an endangered species.
3. Instead, the federal government has agreed to an Oregon plan where we will encourage new plover nesting in key areas, starting with these three: Clatsop Spit, Necanicum Spit and Nehalem Spit.
4. None of these three beaches will close to people, but you will have to keep your dog on a leash and vehicles off the part of the area where plovers might nest. It would also be nice if you chose to take a different route to the beach rather than walk through the areas being groomed to attract plovers, but that's up to you.
5. If plovers nest **outside** these key areas, that beach will still remain open rather than close. That's the deal under our permit with the federal government.
6. These actions meet federal requirements for protecting the species and keep our popular beaches open for recreation.

General questions about plovers and the Oregon ocean shore recreation area

1. Why plan for plovers and recreation?

The Western Snowy Plover is on the Federal and State list of threatened species. Citizens and government agencies take actions to protect threatened species, and create environments where those species can once again thrive and reproduce. In the case of plovers, three main factors threaten their survival.

- a. Changes to traditional sandy nesting areas on the beaches mean that plovers have lost the places that they need to live, feed, and raise their young.
- b. Predators—some native, some introduced by people—take more plovers than are replaced by natural reproduction.
- c. When plovers are nesting, feeding and raising their young, they have a harder time surviving if people harm or disturb them.

To help the plover survive and recover, all three forces—habitat, predators and people—are part of the solution. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) is legally responsible for recreation on the ocean shore. Our mission balances the public's right to enjoy the natural resources, and the need to protect those natural resources for the future.

The **Habitat Conservation Plan** ("HCP") developed between OPRD and the Federal United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provides a balanced roadmap for both people and plovers to coexist. Since the HCP concentrates attention on 16 areas of the coast, there's a chance plovers could be harmed on some other Oregon beaches. To protect Oregon from the consequences of accidentally harming plovers in unprotected areas, OPRD obtained an **Incidental Take Permit** ("the Permit") from the USFWS.

2. What is an Incidental Take Permit and a Habitat Conservation Plan?

"Take" is the word used by the Federal Endangered Species Act to describe anything that harms a protected species. Obvious acts like killing or injuring a plover are covered by this word, but so are not-so-obvious things like chasing, interrupting feeding, or scaring birds off nests. "Take" doesn't have to be intentional to be serious; it can be accidental.

Since OPRD manages recreation on the ocean shore under the HCP and the Permit, a certain level of accidental take to the plover will be tolerated. The USFWS sets this level of harm in the permit so it doesn't threaten the plover population's prospects for recovery as long as we're doing our best to help the plover species recover in other places on the ocean shore via the HCP. The HCP designates a few areas where we and other partners on the Oregon ocean shore will help the plover recover. The HCP spells out what kinds of predator control, habitat restoration and changes to recreation are needed to help the plover recover. If plover nests appear in areas **outside** those designated by the Plan, the individual **nest** will be protected, but there wouldn't be any changes to the kinds of recreation people enjoy on that beach.

A description of the Habitat Conservation Plan and its effects on plants, animals and local economies is online at <http://tinyurl.com/oregonplovers> .

3. What is the status of Oregon's plover population? How has it changed?

State and Federal agencies have worked for the past 17 years to help plovers recover on the south Oregon coast by managing predators like crows, ravens and foxes, shifting recreation away from nests to other nearby areas, and restoring habitat. We use symbolic ropes and signs to help identify the dry sand boundaries where plovers are nesting, and talk to people directly about the bird and how they can help it recover. Nine areas on the south coast have been successfully managed for plovers, and plover numbers have climbed from a low of 28 breeding birds in 1992 to 231 in 2012, thanks to careful predator management and habitat repair, and by directing recreation to the wet sand—all the tactics employed by the HCP. To help fulfill the Pacific Northwest's potential for plover recovery, this coordinated approach will be used in other designated areas on the ocean shore, including areas within Fort Stevens State Park, Gearhart Ocean State Recreation Area, and Nehalem Bay State Park.

4. How has recreation been affected in the areas already being managed?

People share the beach with plovers on the south coast. During the nesting season, symbolic ropes and signs direct people around the protected dry sand nesting areas. The wet sand remains open all the time, though sometimes the trails to the ocean have to be changed. Starting next year, dogs are not allowed in these areas, which will also reduce complaints from people who visit the beach. Beaches where dogs can roam off-leash are nearby each of the plover nesting areas, ensuring recreation on the ocean shore for visitors and their pets.

5. **Have any unoccupied areas become occupied after management began?**
After government agencies restored habitat, controlled predators and managed recreation, the plovers returned to areas they historically called home. Some of these areas were next to places the plovers were using, but one was completely cut off from the other areas. Plovers started using this area, the Dunes Overlook, only after restoration began.

6. **What's the overall timeline for starting the new management approach?**
OPRD has completed a site management plan for Bandon State Natural Area, and is developing site management plans for Fort Stevens State Park, Gearhart Ocean State Recreation Area, and Nehalem Bay State Park. These north coast sites do not currently support plovers, but suitable habitat is present and plovers occasionally prospect the beaches. The Fort Stevens plan will be submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in December 2012, with recreation changes enacted in a voluntary way in 2013, and then as a requirement in 2014. Gearhart and Nehalem plans will be submitted in March 2013 and enacted in 2014.

7. **Under the Habitat Conservation Plan, what else will be managed *aside* from recreation?**
We also need to improve the habitat and control predators in areas where plovers already nest. In areas where we want plovers to begin nesting, habitat is key. Making the dry sand welcoming to plovers means removing invasive plants and returning the dunes to their original, native shape.

Specific questions about places where people will share the beach with plovers

1. **What does this mean for each beach in the Habitat Conservation Plan?**
There are two kinds of beaches in the plan:
 - Places owned or leased by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are called “Snowy Plover Management Areas.” Bandon State Natural Area already has plovers, and three other areas (Fort Stevens State Park, Gearhart Ocean State Recreation Area, and Nehalem Bay State Park) on the north coast will be managed to encourage plovers to start nesting.
 - Places **outside** of land owned by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are called “Recreation Management Areas.” Some have plovers and are currently managed to protect them, but some don't have plovers and will be managed only if plovers show up or if the land manager asks to start managing to attract plovers.

2. **Does this mean the end of the public beach?**
Not at all. Read on for more specifics, but as you do, remember: in the areas where we manage for plovers, only *part* of the beach is affected. An area of dry sand will be set aside to either help nesting plovers, or to encourage them to start nesting, from March to September. Right next to the managed area, on that very same beach, is a

stretch of the coast completely unchanged by plover management. You won't need to leave, or even change your plans, when you arrive at this beach. Just be aware of what's going on, enjoy the view and maybe even see some wildlife you've never seen before. The habitat improvements to help plovers will also make the ocean shore a more exciting, ecologically healthy place to visit – and will help preserve Oregon's unparalleled tradition of beautiful, unspoiled public beaches.

3. So what will happen on beaches owned by State Parks where plovers *already* breed?

There's just one state park-owned Snowy Plover Management Area occupied by plovers: Bandon State Natural Area. The site management plan was completed in June, 2012 that includes managing for plovers:

- Symbolic fences, ropes, and signs set the dry sand breeding areas apart from the rest of the beach Mar. 15- Sept. 15. Visitors are directed to the wet sand, or to the nearest dry sand outside the managed area.
- Close the beach to all vehicles, dogs and kite flying. There are beaches right next to the managed site where people can take their pets and kites.
- Restore and maintain habitat, and manage predators.
- Provide public education, and assign a beach ranger (and additional law enforcement as needed) to support public education and enforcement.
- Monitor plover breeding.

4. What about beaches owned by State Parks where the plovers *don't* breed now?

Four park-managed Snowy Plover Management Area beaches don't have plovers now, but have decent habitat: Clatsop Spit, Necanicum Spit, Nehalem Spit and Netarts Spit.

- First, we will prepare site management plans in 2013 for three north coast sites: Clatsop Spit (Fort Stevens State Park), Necanicum Spit (Gearhart State Recreation Area), and Nehalem Spit (Nehalem Bay State Park). No changes to Netarts Spit (Cape Lookout State Park) at this time.
- The specifics will be written into the plans, but it's likely as early as 2014 dogs will be required to be on-leash. We'll ask for voluntary help; if you can, please take a different path to reach the beach rather than the path that goes through a potential plover nesting area. Except for the Clatsop Spit, these areas are already off-limits to motorized vehicles.
- Restore habitat where needed, and use non-lethal measures to control predators. Check for snowy plovers and nests March through July.
- Provide public interpretation and education.
- At least three unoccupied areas will always be managed to encourage snowy plovers. If any of the first three sites becomes occupied, then we will start managing Netarts Spit north of Cape Lookout State Park.
- Instead of state park sites, other land managers could volunteer to start managing for plovers, and those voluntary sites would count toward the minimum of three unoccupied sites being managed for plovers at any given time.

5. What about beaches not owned by state parks where plovers don't live?

These Recreation Management Areas could be managed to encourage plovers if the landowner decides to join the effort. Six places—Bayocean Spit, South Sand Lake Spit, Tahkenitch South, Umpqua River North Jetty, Elk River Spit and Euchre Creek—all have potential to help plovers. If these other landowners (mainly other federal agencies) join the effort, we'd coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to treat them like the unoccupied state park sites described under above.

6. So when does all this happen?

The Fort Stevens plan will be submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in December 2012, with recreation changes enacted in a voluntary way in 2013, and then as a requirement in 2014. Gearhart and Nehalem plans will be submitted in March 2013 and enacted in 2014.

7. How will plover management under this plan affect the economy?

An analysis of the plan's effects (<http://tinyurl.com/oregonplovers>) shows plover recovery will have next to no effect on the tourism-heavy coastal economy. Plover management areas will not close any whole beach. When a visitor arrives, one relatively small portion of the site will be used for plover recovery, but the rest of the beach will be open and essentially unchanged. People—locals and tourists both—can choose to visit a particular beach where plovers actually live, and will simply have to turn toward the unaffected stretch of beach to play. For the three beaches where plovers do not currently live, visitors can go anywhere, but will need to keep their dogs on a leash. Some new visitors could be attracted to plover recovery areas to see or learn about the birds, since birdwatching is one of the fastest growing recreational hobbies.

8. How will we help visitors understand how to share the beach with plovers?

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will design an education program and incorporate it into interpretive programs and the campground reservation system. OPRD has four Beach Rangers assigned to the Oregon coast to talk with visitors and provide information about plovers. Signs, brochures, websites, and interpretive programs will be addressed in individual beach management plans.

9. How long will we manage for plovers?

This plan and the Incidental Take Permit are intended to last 25 years. If plovers are still threatened (or worse) at the end of that time, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will meet with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to review the terms of the permit and the Habitat Conservation Plan to determine if additional or different conservation measures are needed. On the way to this 25 year mark, the HCP's effectiveness will also be evaluated every five years.