



News Release

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/>

For Release: May 18, 2009

Contacts: Charna Lefton, 505-248-6285; Patricia Mehlhop, 505-248-6663

Revised Designation of Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover to be Announced

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the revised designation of Critical Habitat for the wintering population of the piping plover in 18 specific units in Texas under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. In total, approximately 139,029 acres fall within the boundaries of the revised critical habitat designation. The revised critical habitat is located in Cameron, Willacy, Kenedy, Kleberg, Nueces, Aransas, Calhoun, Matagorda, and Brazoria Counties, Texas. Other previously designated critical habitat for the wintering piping plover in Texas or elsewhere in the United States remains unaffected. This final rule becomes effective on May 18, 2009.

When designating an area as critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service to consider economics, the impact to national security, and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of designating it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless the exclusions would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species. The Service has not excluded any areas that were proposed in May 2008 from this final revised designation.

Critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a protected species. The areas may require special management considerations and protection.

The wintering piping plover is protected on its wintering grounds as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It is a shorebird that uses intertidal beaches and flats and associated dune systems and flats above annual high tide in coastal areas. The intertidal areas offer foraging and roosting sites. Areas above high tide provide refuge from high winds and cold weather.

The Service had designated critical habitat for piping plovers from North Carolina to Texas in 2001. In 2006, the Texas General Land Office challenged 19 of the 37 wintering piping plover critical habitat units in Texas.

This final rule, the associated final economic analysis, and the final environmental assessment are available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> or www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Library/. Comments and materials we received, as well as supporting documentation we used in preparing this final rule, are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours,

at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Corpus Christi Ecological Services Field Office, 6300 Ocean Drive, TAMU-CC, Unit 5837, Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5837.

The piping plover is a small, pale-colored North American shorebird named for its melodic mating call. The species breeds in three discrete areas of North America – the Northern Great Plains, the Great Lakes, and the Atlantic Coast. Plovers from all three breeding populations winter in coastal areas of the United States from North Carolina to Texas, and along the coast of eastern Mexico and on some Caribbean islands.

Piping plovers begin arriving on the wintering grounds in Texas as early as July with some late-nesting birds arriving in September. A few can be found on the wintering grounds throughout the year, but sightings are rare in late May, June, and early July. While their migration is poorly understood, a recent study suggests that plovers use inland and coastal stopover sites when migrating from breeding areas to wintering grounds. In late February, piping plovers begin leaving the wintering grounds to migrate north to breeding sites. Northward migration peaks in late March, and by late May most birds have left the wintering grounds.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

-FWS-