

HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL PIPING PLOVER CENSUS AND PLANS FOR THE 2006 CENSUS. Elise Elliott-Smith¹ and Sue Haig². U.S. Geological Service, Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center, 3200 SW Jefferson Way, Corvallis, OR, 97331; Phone: (541) 750-7390; Fax: (541) 758-8806. ¹eelliott-smith@usgs.gov. ²susan_haig@usgs.gov.

The International Piping Plover Breeding and Winter Census was first organized in 1991 to obtain a more complete understanding of the status and distribution of this federally threatened and endangered species. Since 1991 there have been subsequent Breeding and winter censuses every five years. Instead of providing only a snapshot of information, multiple censuses' have revealed trends in species distribution and abundance. This has informed recovery efforts, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of progress towards downlisting and delisting. Additionally, census data have been used to quantify habitat use, identify areas of special concern, and develop predictive population models. A total of three complete censuses have been conducted and we are currently beginning preparations for the 2006 International Piping Plover Census. A complete species census is an enormous feat that is rarely undertaken. Complete censuses have only been conducted for a few narrowly distributed avian species such as the federally endangered San Clemente Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus mearnsi*). Our challenge is particularly great because the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a widely distributed, migratory species. During the 2001 census, nearly 1,400 participants from 32 U.S. States and Puerto Rico; 9 Canadian Provinces; St. Pierre and Miquelon, France; Cuba, and the Bahamas visited approximately 2,244 sites covering more than 11,836 km of shoreline habitat. Participants included individuals from federal agencies, state and provincial agencies, academic institutions, private businesses, and other non-governmental organizations. Because the 2006 Winter Census will take place in less than one year, the monumental effort involved in coordinating requires that planning begin today. The Winter Census is phenomenally important, yet the most difficult part of the International Census to organize and carry out. Thus, we look forward to the opportunity to begin this process at this meeting. With assistance from many and early planning the 2006, fourth International Piping Plover Census will be a great success in providing data essential to Piping Plover conservation efforts and assessment.