

Dockweiler Beach Snowy Plover Enclosure Report

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Construction and Maintenance of the Dockweiler Enclosure.

On August 14, 2010 a crew 10-13 people from Los Angeles County Department of Beaches & Harbors (LACoBH), led by Mr. Pete Hernandez, completed the majority of the fence set-up between 8am and 12:30pm. On August 15, 2010, the remaining fencing component was added to the north side to complete the agreed-upon 100ft by 300ft enclosure, open on the seaward side, and signs were installed that day as well. The fence is comprised of wooden snow fencing secured to metal t-posts with wire and zip-ties. Reflective material was placed on tops of t-posts to aid visibility in low light conditions. One interpretive sign and one “no trespassing” sign were placed side-by-side on each side of the enclosure, for a total of six signs. The enclosure was placed somewhat inland from the winter tideline, with the goal of providing the plovers with adequate dry sand habitat in the event of winter storms. It was centered on where the plovers were located on the day of set-up, which was consistent with where they had been observed upon their return to the site in July. During set-up, plovers remained in the area, shifting from the wrackline to the center of the enclosure, but never leaving the area. Thus far, the enclosure appears to be well-respected, and staff has observed that most vehicles tend to drive around the back of the enclosure as opposed to the wrackline in front. Staff visits the enclosure at least twice a month to observe the plovers and remove trash. One of our biggest concerns about the enclosure was the possibility of vandalism and trash dumping. However, to date there has been no destructive vandalism of the enclosure, though occasionally people will hang small, lost objects (necklace, plush toys, etc) on the fence. There has been minimal trash, mostly styrofoam and plastic food wrappers, which staff has been able to remove within 15-20 minutes during a visit. We have worked with LACoBH since the construction of the enclosure to secure and renew a right-of-entry permit every six months for pre-scheduled days, allowing staff and volunteers to enter the enclosure to remove trash. Though it is within their right to do so, LACoBH has not taken the enclosure down during the summer months, and thus the enclosure has remained up continuously since August 2010. See Appendix 1 for images of the Dockweiler enclosure.

Construction and Maintenance of the Santa Monica Enclosure.

In the late fall of 2010 we used a small portion of the enclosure funding to financially assist Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society and the City of Santa Monica in constructing a seasonal Snowy Plover enclosure on Santa Monica beach. For multiple years prior to and after this financial assistance, both entities have coordinated to set up this enclosure. The enclosure is typically set up in September and removed once the plovers have left in May. See Appendix 2 for image.

Snowy Plover presence at project enclosure sites.

The table below shows roosting Snowy Plovers using the Dockweiler and Santa Monica enclosure from September 2010 to January 2013. Snowy Plovers typically returned to both sites by late July or early August. Los Angeles Audubon has coordinated, in partnership with Ryan Ecological Consulting, Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society, and Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon, county-wide Snowy Plover surveys since 2007 through funding distinct from the Dockweiler Enclosure Project grant.

County-wide Survey Date	Dockweiler Enclosure Snowy Plover numbers	Santa Monica Enclosure Snowy Plover numbers
September 2010	28	39
January 2011	34	58
March 2011	14	50
May 2011	0	0
Sept 2011	38	34
January 2012	33	58
March 2012	34	61
May 2012	0	0
September 2012	41	48
January 2013	29	47

Unanticipated consequences of this project

Use of the Dockweiler enclosure for outreach purposes.

The Dockweiler enclosure has served to both protect the roost and educate the public about an important conservation issue. Though most of the coordination of Snowy Plover outreach aspects is conducted through a separate source of funding from USFWS, a portion of the enclosure project funds were approved for use in conducting outreach at the site. Between the fall of 2010 and the fall of 2012, over 400 students from four different Los Angeles public schools (Dorsey High School, Politi Elementary, Weemes Elementary, and New Los Angeles Charter Middle School) visited the Dockweiler enclosure on guided field trips to observe Snowy Plovers in their native habitat. The enclosure's proximity to parking and restrooms and the consistently high likelihood of encountering plovers at any time of the day made it an ideal site for student field trips. More details about Snowy Plover outreach activities conducted at Dockweiler Beach and at other sites will be included in a separate report to USFWS.

Recruitment of coastal strand/dune plant species at the Dockweiler enclosure.

Within a year of construction, native and non-native coastal strand/dune plant species germinated within the Dockweiler enclosure (see table below). We worked to remove invasive plants from within the enclosure and along the fence line, but left the native plants alone (see Appendix 1, Photo C). While the vast majority of the surface area within the enclosure remains bare sand, the appearance of vegetation within has been a cause of concern for LACo Beaches and Harbors.

Native Plant Species	Non-native Plant Species
<i>Atriplex leucophylla</i> [beach saltbush]	<i>Cakile maritima</i> [sea rocket]
<i>Abronia maritima</i> [red sand verbena]	<i>Carpobrotus edulis</i> [ice plant]
<i>Ambrosia chamissonis</i> [silver beachweed or silver beach burr]	
<i>Camissonia cheiranthifolia</i> [beach primrose]	

Considerably less clean-up and maintenance required than we anticipated.

There has been drastically less trash than we anticipated at the site. One staff member checking the enclosure every other week has been more than sufficient to keep the enclosure free of trash. Volunteers were employed on only one occasion after a particularly heavy winter storm, and in that case it took one staff member and two volunteers less than an hour to remove trash. The fencing has held up extremely well over the past three years, but we anticipate needing to replace sections of the fencing as the metal rusts within the next couple years.

Building positive relationships with agencies and other organizations.

This project has assisted us in building a positive relationship with the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches & Harbors. It has not only demonstrated that an enclosure at a public beach can be a relatively low-maintenance conservation tool with minimal public outcry, but that it can actually serve as a way to connect the public with a natural resource during the off-season through field trips. The Dockweiler enclosure is also a model that compliments the other two Snowy Plover enclosures found on beaches in Los Angeles County: the Santa Monica enclosure, seasonally constructed by the City of Santa Monica with coordination by Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society, and the Malibu Lagoon enclosure, seasonally constructed by California State Parks with coordination by Los Angeles Audubon. Taken together, these three enclosures and the processes involved in their approval and construction have the potential to serve as a model that other highly urbanized beach communities could use. And thanks to the experience and success of the Dockweiler enclosure project, we will be collaborating with Audubon California and San Diego Audubon to collectively expand our outreach programs through a recently awarded Whaletail Grant (project will begin this fall).

Appendix 1. Photos of the Dockweiler Enclosure



Photo A. View of the Dockweiler enclosure from the northeast (2010).



Photo B. Eye-level view of Dockweiler enclosure (2010).



Photo C. Vegetation within the Dockweiler enclosure (2013).

Appendix 2. Photo of the Santa Monica Enclosure



Photo A. View of the Santa Monica enclosure from the south (2010).