

***Background and Q&As***  
***Final Recovery Plan***  
***Pacific Coast Population of Western Snowy Plover***  
***September, 2007***

**For the Recovery Plan, see**

**<http://www.fws.gov/arcata/es/birds/WSP/plover.html>**

The western snowy plover is a small shorebird that weighs up to 2 ounces and is between 6 and 6½ inches long. It has a pale gray-brown back, white chest, and black legs and bill. Its average life span is about 3 years.

The Pacific coast population of western snowy plovers consists of those birds that nest on the mainland coast, peninsulas, offshore islands, bays, estuaries, or rivers of the Pacific coast from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. They are distinct from western snowy plovers that breed inland.

It is estimated that about 2,100 snowy plovers breed along the Pacific coast from early March to late September. They make their nests on sand spits, dune-backed beaches, beaches at creek and river mouths, some river bars, and salt pans at lagoons and estuaries. Plover chicks leave the nest within hours after hatching to search for food, but are not able to fly for about a month.

Today, only 28 major nesting areas remain. Nesting habitat has been lost to development and the size of the snowy plover population also has declined due to human activity on beaches, such as walking, jogging, walking pets, operating off-road vehicles, and horseback riding during the plover breeding season. Such activities can inadvertently cause destruction of eggs and chicks. Encroachment of exotic European beach grass into nesting areas and predation are other primary factors in the decline of the plover.

The recovery plan was proposed in August 2001. The draft plan described the status, current management, recovery objectives and criteria, and specific actions needed to restore the plover to the point where it could be removed from the list of Endangered and Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

**Q. What is a recovery plan?**

A. Recovery plans are guidance documents for interested parties, including Federal, State and local agencies, private landowners and the public. They include recommendations and management measures. They identify priority areas for conservation planning, recovery objectives, criteria and strategy.

**Q. Why did it take so long to complete the recovery plan?**

A. Three factors were significant in delay of the development of the recovery plan:

- 1) Need to address the plover’s status in relation to a delisting petition and subsequent litigation.
- 2) Need to evaluate the original listing relative to new genetic information and the Service’s 1996 Distinct Population Segment policy.
- 3) Available staff already was committed to meeting court-mandated timeframes on litigated Critical Habitat rules.

**Q. What are the criteria for recovery of the species that would allow it to be delisted?**

A. There are three primary criteria:

- 1) Maintain for 10 years an average of 3,000 breeding adults distributed along the coast in six recovery units according to a formula.

<b>Recovery Unit</b>	<b>Target Number of Breeding Adults</b>
1. Washington and Oregon	250
2. Del Norte--Mendocino Counties, CA	150
3. San Francisco Bay, CA	500
4. Sonoma--Monterey Counties, CA	400
5. San Luis Obispo--Santa Barbara Counties, CA	1,200
6. Los Angeles--San Diego Counties, CA	500

- 2) Maintain annual productivity of at least one fledged chick per male in each Recovery Unit for the last five years prior to delisting.

- 3) Develop and implement mechanisms to assure long-term protection and management of breeding, wintering and migration areas in order to maintain the subpopulation sizes and average productivity established.

**Q. What is the projected cost for the Recovery Plan and time it will take to delist the species?**

A. The estimated cost is \$149,946,000 at this point. If the plan is successful the species could be delisted by 2047, according to the plan.

**Q. Why will it take so long to recover the listed population?**

A. Four main factors are seen as reasons why recovery will take time:

- 1) Recovery Plans are voluntary
- 2) Staff and funding are limited for resource management agencies.
- 3) Threats remain, and can only be managed with agency and public participation
- 4) Plovers occupy a dynamic habitat (such as wind blown sand, encroaching vegetation) that changes frequently. Adjustments to management are needed to accommodate changes.

**Q. What impact will the Recovery Plan have on beach use?**

A. The Recovery Plan is an entirely voluntary effort. It has no regulatory or enforcement authority.

**Q. Does that mean there are no protections for the plover?**

A. Not at all. The fact that the species is listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) provides abundant protection for the plover. The listing of a species puts in force the protections in the ESA for all listed species. Under the ESA no party may “take” a listed species without prior consultation and authorization from the Service. Take is defined broadly in the Act meaning “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.”

**Q. How can I get a copy of the economic analysis?**

A. The analysis can be viewed or downloaded from the Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office’s Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/arcata/es/birds/WSP/plover.html>

**Q. Is the Service considering removing the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover from the list of threatened species?**

A. The Service conducted a review of the status of this species and announced on April 21, 2006 that delisting was not warranted. The conclusion was based on population numbers and distribution, loss of habitat, predation, degradation of habitat by expansion of non-native plant species, and other factors.

The review was conducted in part as a result of several petitions to delist the plover, on filed in August 2002, by the Surf Ocean Beach Commission of Lompoc, California, and a similar petition dated May 30, 2003 from the City of Morro Bay, California. The

petitions contended that the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover does not qualify either as a distinct population segment under the ESA or as a threatened species.

On March 22, 2004, the Service published a notice that the petition presented substantial information to indicate that delisting may be warranted (69 FR 13326). Service biologists are currently conducting both a 12-month and 5-year status review of the population under sections 4(b)(3)(B) and 4(c)(2) of the ESA. That review, which could have recommended delisting or retaining the species' current status, was completed and published in the Federal Register on April 21, 2006.

**Q. Did the Service designate critical habitat for the plover?**

A. On Sept. 29, 2005 the Service designated 12,145 acres of critical habitat along the shoreline of California, Oregon and Washington. The rule reduced by nearly 40 percent the amount of critical habitat it had designated in 1999, a preceding rule ordered re-done by court order in 2003. The reduced acreage largely resulted from greater precision in mapping the habitat needed by the species.

**Q. What other actions has the Service taken regarding the plover?**

A. The Service is also working on proposed special regulations under Section 4(d) of the ESA. The proposed 4(d) rule would encourage non-federal parties to help recover the plover in their areas.

**Q. What impact does critical habitat designation have on beach use?**

A. Outside of the National Wildlife Refuges, the Service leaves beach management to other agencies that have direct responsibility for those areas, such as the California Department of Parks and Recreation. With or without critical habitat, however, the Service has consulted for several years with other Federal, state and local agencies on measures to protect this threatened species. Those measures vary from beach to beach and are subject to ongoing review by managers and biologists to ensure that they meet the conservation needs of the species while being the least intrusive as possible for recreation and other uses.

**If you have any more questions, please call or write to:**

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