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# News Release



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For Immediate Release

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## **Western Snowy Plover Critical Habitat Proposal Reopened for Comment**

*Public Invited to Review Draft Economic Analysis and Several Changes to Proposed Designation*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced the availability of a draft Economic Analysis of the March 22, 2011, proposed revision of critical habitat for the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover. The Service also seeks public comment on several proposed changes to the designation, which are the result of new information received after publication of the proposed revision. The proposed rule will be published in the Federal Register Tuesday, Jan.17, 2012, but an advance copy is available today for viewing at <http://www.federalregister.gov>.

The draft Economic Analysis estimates costs associated with the proposed critical habitat designation to be about \$261,000 over a 20-year timeframe (based on a 7 percent discount rate). More than 70 percent of the estimated impacts are related to military activities on Vandenberg Air Force Base which did not have an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) in place at the time the Service published the proposed critical habitat rule. The Air Force Base has now completed an INRMP, and if the Service determines the plan provides a benefit to the western snowy plover, the Air Force base will be exempted from the revised final critical habitat designation.

New information received during the initial comment period on the proposed rule has also resulted in proposed changes to critical habitat in Unit 46 which includes portions of Bolsa Chica State Beach and Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve in Orange County, California. Based on new information about snowy plover use of habitat in Unit 46 (which includes subunits 46A-E), the Service is proposing to remove some areas because they are no longer occupied by the western snowy plover and adding some areas that are occupied by the species and are essential to its conservation. The Service is also proposing to add one new 2 acre subunit (46F) in the muted tidal basin portion of Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve because it is a nesting and foraging area used by the snowy plover.

In addition to revisions to the March 2011, proposed rule and availability of the draft Economic Analysis, the Service is also seeking public comments to taxonomic changes accepted by the American Ornithological Union (AOU) resulting from genetic work splitting the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) from the snowy plover (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*; formerly *C. alexandrinus nivosus*).

The Pacific Coast western snowy plover is a small shorebird with pale brown to gray upper parts, gray to black legs and bill, and dark patches on the forehead, behind the eyes, and on either side of the upper breast. The Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover is defined as those individuals nesting adjacent to tidal waters of the Pacific Ocean, and includes all nesting birds on the mainland coast, peninsulas, offshore islands, adjacent bays, estuaries and coastal rivers. The Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover breeds primarily on coastal beaches from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico.

Compared to the existing 2005 critical habitat designation, the 2011 proposed revision includes more than twice as many total acres and more critical habitat units. This is partly to offset anticipated adverse effects of rising sea level due to climate change, and also to reflect current policy direction that encourages more consideration of the role unoccupied habitat can provide for the conservation of species.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Since the species was listed as threatened, many local groups have voluntarily worked to protect plovers and their breeding areas, and to help educate the beach-using public about the bird's needs. In many areas, beach users have cooperated with local interests to improve the breeding situation for plovers.

Biologists estimate that no more than 2,270 snowy plovers breed along the Pacific Coast of the United States. The largest number of breeding birds occurs south of San Francisco Bay to southern Baja. The species' decline has been attributed to loss of nesting habitat, human disturbance, encroachment of European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) on nesting grounds, and predation.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains species like the Pacific Coast population of western snowy plover – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our communities.

The notice will officially publish in the *Federal Register* on January 17, 2012, but an advance copy is available today for viewing at <http://www.federalregister.gov>.

The Service is seeking comments and information on all aspects of this proposed rule and will accept comments and information until Friday, February 17, 2012.

Comments and information can be submitted electronically to [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). In the box that reads "Enter Keyword or ID," enter the Docket number FWS-R8-ES-2010-0070. Check the box that reads "Open for

Comment/Submission,” and then click the Search button. You will see an icon that reads “Submit a Comment.” Please ensure that you have found the correct rulemaking before submitting your comment.

If submitting comments by hard copy or hand delivery, please send them to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS–R8–ES–2010-0070, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

The deadline for submission of a final revised critical habitat designation to the *Federal Register* is June 5, 2012.

*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](http://www.fws.gov).*

Note: A listing and maps of the proposed critical habitat units, a link to the *Federal Register*, and other information is available on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/arcata/>.

**A photo of the western snowy plover is available on [Flickr](#)**