



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (6:00)

ATLANTIC COAST PIPING PLOVER (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH ANNE HECHT)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there, this is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Anne Hecht, Endangered Species Biologist. Hi, Anne, how are you today?

MS. HECHT: Good.

MS. LEON: Great. I was hoping that you would spend some time talking to us about the Atlantic Coast Piping Plover.

MS. HECHT: Sure. Piping Plover is a small shore bird. It got its name from its bell like hull. I think Plovers are colored to blend in with the background of their habitat so they're often heard before they're seen.

Their vulnerability comes from the fact that they are a ground nesting bird. They put their eggs right on a beach or a sandbar. And their chicks are precocial which means that within hours of hatching, the chicks have to be escorted by their parents to foraging areas and feed themselves even though they cannot fly for the first 25 to 35 days. They have a couple of life history traits that make them quite vulnerable.

MS. LEON: And I understand that this is a wide range in species breeding in three geographic regions, including the Atlantic Coast, of course, along with the Northern Great Plains and the Great Lake Regions. How is it possible for such a wide range in species to need the protection of the Endangered Species Act?

MS. HECHT: Piping Plovers face very pervasive and persistent threats throughout their reign. Loss and degradation in habitat, the development and artificial shoreline stabilization have been very significant factors in the coastal range and the Great Lakes. Water management activities on the Northern Great Plains have been an important factor in habitat loss.

In addition, the species faces a lot of disturbance from humans attack, especially along the Atlantic Coast and the Great Lakes and some of the human activities in the Coastal Zone, very significantly increase degradation pressure as well.

Also, we're increasingly concerned about disturbance in habitat while in the wintering range of this species which affects all of the breeding populations which are found along our southern coast during almost two thirds of their annual cycle.

MS. LEON: What about climate change? How might the Atlantic coast population be affected?

MS. HECHT: The most obvious concern associated with climate change is accelerating sea level rise. We know that the area beaches have responded and adapted to sea level rise for eons, but we're concerned about the possibility that the accelerating rate may overwhelm the natural mechanisms that have allowed barrier beaches to migrate land and to protect the main land.

In addition, the human response to sea level rise is artificial stabilization. This will abort the natural processes that allow beaches to adapt to sea level rise. And this is going to affect not only the Atlantic Coast breeding population but all of the populations including the inland breeding population in their coastal migration and wintering reign.

MS. LEON: Coastal management programs, I understand, are necessary for the successful recovery of Atlantic Coast Piping Plover populations. However, such necessary recovery actions like this are not always met with public support.

How do we engage the public in recovery when it's likely that a large portion will be vocal in its opposition to things like temporary beach closures and restrictions?

MS. HECHT: We're trying to get the word out that we've developed management approaches that at many sites allow people and birds to share the beach. For example, is coastal twine, which we call symbolic fences to show people the areas that are available for recreation on the seaward portion of the beach while preventing intrusions into important courtship and nesting habitats. And with intensive monitoring we can tailor the timing and location of restrictions as much as possible.

But ultimately Piping Plover protection does impinge on species to some extent. So, we've made a very significant outreach effort to help people understand the Plover's apparent vulnerabilities and the importance of the management practices that we have in place.

And, lastly, we're trying to get the word out that management is working. The Atlantic Coast Piping Plover population has more than doubled in the last 20 years and we know that this is a direct result of improved productivity.

MS. LEON: Has the Service had much help in this recovery effort?

MS. HECHT: Absolutely. I like to say that the Pipe Plovers are an extremely lucky species. And this is because despite their vulnerability, they are the beneficiaries of one of the most recovery cooperator network that I know of.

National wildlife refuges, the National Park Service, the State wildlife agencies in the species range, State municipal beach managers, conversation groups devote tens of thousands of hours every year to protect the Atlantic Coast Piping Plovers on their breeding ground. And we're now seeing the emergence of a parallel effort on the wintering ground.

And the good news is not only that the Piping Plovers are benefiting from this cooperator effort, but that there are many other sensitive beach species that are also reaping the benefits of the efforts that are being put out on behalf of Piping Plovers.

MS. LEON: Thank you so much for your time today, Anne. It was a pleasure having you on.

MS. HECHT: Well, thank you.

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks for listening.