

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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September 8, 2003

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**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WITHDRAWS PROPOSAL
TO LIST THE MOUNTAIN PLOVER AS A THREATENED SPECIES**

Working with state fish and wildlife agencies and private landowners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the past four years has developed more data about the status of the mountain plover that does not indicate the species is in danger of becoming an endangered species for the foreseeable future. The Service withdrew its proposal to list the mountain plover, a grassland bird found in the mountain west, as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

"After reviewing all current information on the mountain plover, the Service made this determination because threats to the species as identified in the 1999 proposed rule are not as significant as earlier believed," said Ralph Morgenweck, director of the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. "Survey data do not demonstrate that the population is in decline and the best available information does not indicate that the species is in danger of becoming an endangered species in the foreseeable future," he added.

In reaching this decision to withdraw the listing proposal, the Service considered new information indicating that in some areas of the species' breeding range, croplands provide alternate nesting locations. The Service also found that declines in local population numbers at specific locations are not supported by statewide estimates throughout the range, which suggest that the continental population has not changed significantly in the past decade. New information made available this year from many State and

Federal agencies indicates that occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat, which provides habitat for nesting plovers, is more abundant than previously believed. In addition, a variety of conservation efforts initiated for mountain plovers and other species of the high plains in several western states benefit the mountain plover.

"Thanks in great part to the cooperation of private landowners, in the past several years we have learned a great deal regarding mountain plovers using croplands as alternate nesting locations," said Morgenweck.

The current total population of mountain plovers is estimated to be between 5,000 and 11,000 individuals. Historically, breeding mountain plovers were widely distributed in the Great Plains region from Canada south to Texas. At this time mountain plovers occur in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Nebraska, Texas, California, Arizona, and Nevada. Most breeding occurs in Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming, and an estimated 85 percent of the population winters in the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys of California.

In the last few years, federal land management agencies and state and county governments have become more actively involved in mountain plover management. For example, formalized conservation efforts by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, in cooperation with the Colorado Farm Bureau, will improve the status of the mountain plover. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, working with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, has also initiated a landowner incentive program called the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership. While both the Colorado and Nebraska habitat conservation programs are voluntary, both wildlife agencies have the authority to initiate, fund and implement them. These conservation efforts are new but have shown some initial successes and are likely to provide a significant level of protection for the mountain plover.

Other new conservation measures for the mountain plover include the recently established federal, state and private High Plains Partnership; the Department of Defense's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for Fort Carson, Colorado; several Habitat Conservation Plans on the wintering grounds in California; the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Prairie Partners; The Nature Conservancy's "Prairie Wings" and private land conservation easement efforts in South Park, Colorado. In addition, the Service has initiated discussions with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to explore ways to benefit mountain plovers on private lands. These include grazing plans that encourage high grazing intensity in plover nesting areas.

Copies of the withdrawal can be obtained from the Western Colorado Field Office (Mountain Plover), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 764 Horizon

Drive, Building B, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506-3946.

Historically, the mountain plover was found on grasslands that were used by large numbers of bison, elk, and pronghorn, as well as burrowing animals such as prairie dogs, kangaroo rats, and badgers. Grazing, wallowing, and burrowing activities created and maintained the type of habitat that mountain plovers prefer. Currently, mountain plovers commonly show a preference for prairie dog towns, and sites that are heavily grazed by domestic livestock. They also can be found on sod farms, alkali flats, cultivated fields, and other types of agricultural lands which mimic their preferred habitat. A mixture of short vegetation and bare ground, and a flat topography are habitat defining characteristics of mountain plovers at both breeding and wintering locations.

The mountain plover averages 8 inches in body length and similar in size and appearance to the killdeer. It is light brown above with a lighter colored breast, but lacks the contrasting dark breast belt common to most other plovers, including the killdeer. It eats insects such as beetles, grasshoppers, crickets and ants. Its scientific name is *Charadrius montanus*. Information on the mountain plover can be found by searching <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/mtnplover> and www.usgs.gov.

The Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

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Visit the mountain-prairie region at: <http://www.mountainprairie.fws.gov>