

# News Release



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## **DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR PIPING PLOVER PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced the availability of a draft economic analysis and environmental assessment on a proposal to designate revised critical habitat for the wintering population of the piping plover in coastal areas of Dare and Hyde counties of North Carolina.

The analysis finds the costs associated with conservation activities for the wintering population of the piping plover are forecast to range from \$0 to \$12.2 million in lost consumer surplus and \$0 to \$21.1 million in lost trip expenditures over the next 20 years, with an additional \$32,000 to \$79,000 in administrative costs.

The draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation for the wintering population of the piping plover identifies and analyzes the effect of possible beach closures on off-road vehicle use and potential administrative costs of Endangered Species Act consultations undertaken by the National Park Service.

The proposed critical habitat areas include intertidal beaches and flats and associated dune systems and flats above annual high tide. Intertidal areas offer foraging and roosting sites while the areas above high tide offer protection from high winds and cold weather.

The draft environmental assessment evaluates the environmental consequences of designating critical habitat for the wintering population of the piping plover in North Carolina. The scope of the environmental assessment includes an evaluation of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the designation of the four proposed critical habitat units, as well as the option to only designate some of the units or some portion of the units identified in the proposed rule.

The piping plover is a small, pale-colored North American shorebird named for its melodic mating call. The species breeds in three discrete areas of North America – the Northern Great Plains, the Great Lakes, and the Atlantic Coast. Plovers from all three breeding populations winter in coastal areas of the United States from North Carolina to Texas, and along the coast of eastern Mexico and on some Caribbean islands. In 1986, the piping plover was listed as endangered in the Great Lakes watershed, and as threatened elsewhere within its range, including migratory routes outside of the Great Lakes watershed, and in the species' wintering grounds (which include North Carolina).

The Service is reopening the public comment period for 60 days to allow all interested parties an opportunity to comment simultaneously on the proposed critical habitat designation and the associated draft economic analysis and environmental assessment. A description of the proposed critical habitat designation, draft economic analysis, and environmental assessment are available at [www.fws.gov/nc-es/piplch/piplch.html](http://www.fws.gov/nc-es/piplch/piplch.html), or you may call 919/856-4520 for a copy.

Written comments on the proposal and the economic analysis and environmental assessment should be submitted to: Wintering Piping Plover Critical Habitat Comments, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Post Office Box 33726, Raleigh, NC 27636-3726. Comments may also be sent electronically to [ncplovercomments@fws.gov](mailto:ncplovercomments@fws.gov) or faxed to 919/856-4556.

In addition, the Service has scheduled a public hearing on the proposed amended critical habitat designation and the draft economic analysis and environmental assessment. The hearing will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. on June 20, 2007, at the Fessenden Center, 46830 Highway 12, Buxton, Dare County, North Carolina. The hearing will be preceded by a public information session from 4 to 5 p.m., at the same location. Maps of the proposal and other materials will be available for public review.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife 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 comprised of more than 547 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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