

News release

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**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Town of Orleans craft proposal to conserve piping plovers while increasing beach access for off-road vehicles**

*Agency invites public review and comments*

As a result of the long-term success in conserving threatened piping plovers in Massachusetts, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with the Town of Orleans and Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to increase access for over-sand vehicles (OSV) while the town takes steps to avoid and make up for effects to plover chicks.

“The efforts of towns, private conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies have resulted in a significant increase in the piping plover population in Massachusetts, from around 140 pairs when the species was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1986 to 650 pairs in 2013,” said Tom Chapman, supervisor for the Service’s New England Field Office. “We recognize that success and are proud to continue working with the Town of Orleans to engage the public in recovering this threatened shorebird.”

Orleans is the first town to undertake habitat conservation planning for OSV use on beaches with piping plovers. A habitat conservation plan is needed because OSV operation in the vicinity of flightless piping plover chicks can accidentally injure or kill them. The draft plan proposes measures to protect chicks, such as self-escorting vehicles, monitoring, and limiting vehicle use. In addition, the town has proposed to contribute to a conservation fund managed by MassWildlife to increase productivity on state plover beaches through selective predator management.

The plan is required for the Service to issue a 3-year incidental take permit under the Endangered Species Act authorizing the potential effects of OSV use on up to eight chicks a year on a nearly one-mile stretch of Nauset Beach.

The Massachusetts piping plover population alone has exceeded the New England recovery unit goal of 625 pairs of plovers (1,250 plovers) the last three years, largely due to the efforts of landowners, beach managers and the state in maintaining a successful piping plover recovery program. No other recovery unit in the species’ range has been able to consistently reach its goal in the last 10 years.

The Service welcomes public comment on the town's draft habitat conservation plan and the Service's draft environmental action statement from December 19 through January 20, 2014. After the comment period ends, the Service will address comments and new information and determine whether the plan needs to be amended based on new information. Once all criteria have been met, the Service would make a final decision on issuing the permit.

More information:

- Access the draft habitat conservation plan and environmental action statement at the [New England Field Office website](#).
- Starting December 19, comment on the documents at [regulations.gov](#) under docket number [FWS-R5-ES-2014-0051](#).
- Find the draft plan and other related documents at the [Town of Orleans website](#).
- Learn more about the [Atlantic Coast piping plover breeding population](#) and [habitat conservation planning](#) under the Endangered Species Act.

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