

OPRD News Release

Title: Western Snowy Plovers Nesting on Nehalem Spit

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A surprise sighting of a pair of western snowy plovers nesting on the spit south of Nehalem Bay State Park has Oregon State Parks staff on "bird alert." It also means some changes for beachgoers on the two-mile stretch of beach south of the park's day-use area.

"This is early in the year for snowy plovers to be nesting," said Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD) Wildlife Biologist Vanessa Blackstone, who discovered the nest April 3. "It's exciting news. This is the first time in 30 years that we have a confirmed nest here, and supports all the hard work Oregonians have done to help this species survive." Other adult male and female plovers have been seen along the spit in recent days as well.

The western snowy plover is a species protected by both federal and state statute. They nest in dry open sand, in tiny, shallow scrapes that are very well camouflaged. Not only are nests easy to miss (or step on), but the bird will abandon its eggs if disturbed too frequently.

Sightings of nests prompt special precautions in designated snowy plover management areas such as the southern portion of the Nehalem spit. Visitors will see signs on the dry sand in these shorebird conservation areas. This also means that all activities on the dry sand will be curtailed until the end of the nesting season September 15. People and horseback riders are welcome to walk along the wet sand on the entire spit, but dogs, even on leash, must use the three miles of beach north of the park's day-use area. Driving is already prohibited on the spit. As with dogs, bicycles—a kind of non-motorized vehicle under Oregon law—are only allowed north of the area during the nesting season.

OPRD spokesperson Chris Havel said, "We're asking the public to respect any directions they may get from rangers, or from signs and designated areas." He emphasized that public recreation restrictions happen only in those areas targeted as special plover habitat, and only in nesting season. "If a plover pair nests outside the targeted beaches, we protect the nest, but public use of the beach doesn't change." On the north coast, approximately 5½ miles of riverside or ocean beach divided among three areas are part of a snowy plover management area. The Nehalem Spit management area is approximately 2 miles long. The other two areas are portions of the Necanicum and Clatsop spits. More details can be found at bit.ly/wsplover. Videos, photos, and other updates of the new nest will be posted online. The park will present interpretive programs about plovers through the summer.

OPRD is legally responsible for managing recreation on Oregon's ocean shore. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) oversees the Endangered Species Act, and thus the status of the western snowy plover. OPRD's legal agreement with the USFWS, the Habitat Conservation Plan, spells out how to help the plover population recover.

In 2014, 338 adult plovers called Oregon home, an increase of approximately 10 percent over 2013's estimate of 304 adults. 2014 was also a promising year for fledglings, with 272 chicks surviving to learn to fly.