

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office
2800 Cottage Way
Suite W-2605
Sacramento, Calif. 95825
Phone: 916/414-6600
Fax: 916/414-6714

News Release



For Immediate Release
April 21, 2006

Contacts:
Al Donner, 916-414-6566

For specific areas, please contact:
Lois Grunwald (Central California Coast), 805-644 -1766 ext. 332
Jane Hendron (Southern California Coast), 760-431 -9440 ext. 205
Michael Long (Northern California Coast), 707-822 -7201
Phil Carroll (Oregon/Washington), 503-231- 6179
Doug Zimmer (Washington), 360 -753 -4370

For more information, including a Q&A, photos, and links to the Federal Register notice, please visit the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/sacramento/>.

Western Snowy Plover to Retain Threatened Status *U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes innovative strategy under ESA to encourage local conservation efforts*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today a finding that the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover remains at risk from habitat loss, human disturbances and other perils and should retain its status as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

After reviewing the best scientific evidence, the Service finds that delisting the species from the federal list of threatened and endangered species is not warranted. The Service concluded that the Pacific Coast western snowy plover population is markedly separate from other populations and that it meets the requirements for protection as a distinct population segment (DPS) under the ESA.

However, in completing an in-depth review of the status of the western snowy plover, the Service found significant progress has been made toward bringing the species back to health, and the Service is proposing a new rule that would support and enhance local conservation efforts.

The Service seeks public comment on the proposed rule for 60 days. Comments, information and suggestions may be sent to the Field Supervisor (Attn: WSP-4d), Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1655 Heindon Road, Arcata, California 95521 or by fax at 707-822-8411.

The western population of the tiny shorebird that breeds in coastal areas in California, Oregon and Washington has been listed as threatened since 1993. The current population estimate for the U.S. portion

of the Pacific Coast population is approximately 2,300, based on a 2005 survey. The largest number of breeding birds occurs south of San Francisco Bay to southern Baja. It is classified as a “distinct population segment” under the ESA, separate from populations that nest in inland areas from Nevada and Utah to Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Today’s action was triggered by two petitions filed in 2002 and 2003, respectively, by the Surf-Ocean Beach Commission of Lompoc, CA, and the City of Morro Bay, CA, seeking to delist the Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover. The petitions contended that the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover does not qualify either as a distinct population or as a threatened species.

The Service found that the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover is markedly separate from other populations of plover due to behavioral differences. With only very isolated exceptions, the birds of the Pacific Coast breed and stay on the coast their entire lives. The discreteness of this population meets the legal requirements to qualify as a distinct population segment (DPS) under the ESA. Threats to the bird remain essentially the same since the time of listing under the ESA in 1993.

At the same time, the Service concluded that significant progress has been made toward recovery in a relatively short period, but that additional recovery actions are needed to assure the species’ long-term survival. In order to encourage continued recovery efforts, the Service is proposing a rule that will have conservation benefits for the bird when finalized.

The rule – known as a “special rule” under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act – would allow some incidental loss, or “take,” of western snowy plovers within counties that have met their Breeding Bird Management Goals as specified in the 2001 Draft Recovery Plan for the western snowy plover.

The special rule is intended to increase local public support for western snowy plover recovery; provide an incentive to counties to develop management plans to meet recovery goals; and enable the Service to focus limited staff and financial resources in those counties where the recovery need is greatest. The public comment period of the proposed rule will be open for 60 days.

The western snowy plover is distinguished from other plovers by its small size, pale brown upper parts, dark patches on either side of the upper breast, and dark gray to blackish legs. Snowy plovers weigh between 1.2 and 2 ounces. They are generally 5 to 7 inches long. The Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover breeds primarily on coastal beaches from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The decline of the species has been attributed to loss of nesting habitat, human disturbance, encroachment of European beach grass on nesting grounds, and predation. The species was listed as threatened in 1993, and the Service designated critical habitat in 2005.

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, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management 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 Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

###