

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE OF PIPING PLOVERS AND SNOWY PLOVERS IN FLORIDA. Terry J. Doonan¹, Karen M. Lamonte², and Nancy Douglass³. ¹Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 3377 East U.S. Highway 90, Lake City, FL, 32055; Phone: (386) 758-0656; Fax: (386) 758-5799; terry.doonan@myfwc.com. ²3911 Highway 2321, Panama City, FL. ³3900 Drane Field Road, Lakeland, FL.

Both the piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*; State and federally listed as Threatened) and snowy plover (*C. alexandrinus*; State listed as Threatened) have patchy distributions along the coasts of Florida that are correlated with the availability of suitable, open beach habitat. Numbers and the distribution of both species have declined or are vulnerable to declines with loss and degradation of habitat. Wintering piping plovers typically are present across the Gulf, Keys, and Atlantic coasts of Florida from October to March, but have been recorded as early as August and as late as June. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has identified 34 units of Critical Habitat for piping plovers in Florida. Within those units, 464, 369, and 371 piping plovers were counted during the 1991, 1996, and 2001 International Piping Plover Censuses, respectively. During a wintering shorebird survey conducted by the Commission in 1993-1994, 458 piping plovers were recorded at 16 sites. Banded piping plovers from the Great Lakes population have been recorded from sites in northeast Florida and along the Gulf coast, with greatest numbers observed in northeast Florida and the Tampa Bay area. Most banded piping plovers recorded in northeast Florida were from the Great Lakes and Canadian Maritime Province breeding populations, with much smaller percentages banded in the Great Plains and Mid-Atlantic regions. Snowy Plovers nest in Florida from March to September, at sites along the Gulf coast from Pensacola to Marco Island (Collier County), but most nesting occurs in the Panhandle. A 1989 statewide survey conducted by the Commission showed that 145 of 167 snowy plover nesting pairs were in the Panhandle. A 2002 statewide breeding survey done by the Commission found 216 breeding pairs of snowy plovers that nested or attempted to nest; 155 pairs nested on Panhandle beaches and the remainder nested along the southwest coast. Snowy plovers overwinter in Florida, primarily in the Panhandle. In 2002, Commission-conducted statewide surveys of wintering snowy plovers produced counts of 252-305 individuals. These results were consistent with earlier surveys, such as the 2001 International Census, during which 311 snowy plovers were recorded wintering in Florida.