

Shorebirds

Effects Determination Guidance for Endangered & Threatened Species (EDGES)

Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh Counties

Species Covered by This EDGES: Red knot (*Calidris canutus*) and piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) -Threatened.

Piping plovers breed in North America in three regions: the upper Atlantic Coast, the Northern Great Plains, and the Great Lakes. The bird is a winter migrant in Georgia, foraging on beaches on all the coastal barrier islands. Some wintering birds arrive in Georgia as early as late Jun-early July, but most arrive in October. In spring most have left for breeding areas by late April. Loss of wintering sites can reduce survival by increasing competition with other piping plovers and shorebird species. These birds are susceptible to disturbance by humans, pets, and vehicular traffic, which often cause repeated flushing, depleting vital fat reserves needed for successful migration. To protect these areas, Critical Habitat for piping plovers has been designated on most of Georgia's beaches (see IPaC).



The red knot nests in the summer in the far north, mostly well above the Arctic Circle in Canada, Europe, and Russia. During other seasons, it is strictly coastal, migrating south after breeding to large sandy estuaries and beaches around the world referred to as 'winter habitat'. In Georgia this includes Little Tybee, Wassaw, St. Catherines, Blackbeard, Sapelo, Little St. Simons, and Cumberland Islands, as well as St. Catherines Island Bar, Wolf Island, Little Egg Island Bar, and Little St. Simons Island at the mouth of the Altamaha River support the only known late summer and fall staging site for red knots on the east coast of the U.S., attracting as many as 12,000 birds at one time. Loss of food resources at these Georgia stopover sites is a primary threat to the species, as is habitat loss caused by beach armoring structures that alter and interfere with the natural dynamics of sand deposition. No critical habitat rules have been published for the red knot.



In Georgia, foraging habitat for both species of listed shorebirds is the moist or wet sand of inter-tidal beaches and tidal flats. Sheltering and roosting habitat is beaches and dunes above the annual high tide.

This EDGES covers projects on beaches and tidal flats.

Endangered Species Act Consultation Checklist:

Applicant:

1. IPaC indicates red knots or piping plovers may occur in the project area.
 - a. No.....No effect. Provide IPaC information to the Savannah District with application/PCN.
 - b. Yes.....Go to #2.

2. The proposed project will impact or alter any of Georgia's coastal beaches, sandy north/south island ends, or associated dune habitat.
 - a. No.....No effect. Provide this information to the Savannah District with application/PCN
 - b. Yes.....Go to #3.

3. The Fish and Wildlife Service's Georgia Field Office (GAES) in Townsend provided documentation stating project impacts to piping plovers and red knots were likely to be minimal.
 - a. No.....Provide completed EDGES Applicant Coordination Slip and supporting documentation to the Savannah District with 404 application/PCN.
 - b. Yes.....Provide GAES project review documentation and/or survey data to the Savannah District with application/PCN.

Savannah District:

4. IPAC indicates the project is within designated Critical Habitat for piping plovers.
 - a. No.....Savannah District has determined no effect to piping plover critical habitat. Consultation complete for critical habitat. FWS-GA concurrence not needed. Go to #5 for potential effects to listed species.
 - b. Yes.....Contact GAES-Townsend to determine if consultation is needed.
5. The project will impact a coastal beach (see #2).
 - a. No..... No effect.
 - b. Yes..... Go to #6
6. The project is on Wolf Island, Little Egg Island Bar, or Little St. Simons Island (i.e. migration habitat for red knots).
 - a. No.....Go to #7.
 - b. Yes.....May affect. Consultation required.
7. The project would result in impacts >6 months to piping plover or red knot foraging habitat (e.g., construction of groins, sea walls, jetties, ocean piers, etc).
 - a. No.....Go to #8.
 - b. Yes.....May affect. Consultation required.
8. The project will cause temporary impacts to foraging habitat (e.g., beach renourishment, beach restoration, or inlet sand transfer) and will be constructed only from May through July, when the birds are not on winter habitat.
 - a. No.....Go to #9.
 - b. Yes..... NLAA. Consultation complete. FWS-GA concurrence not needed.
9. The conditions below will be implemented throughout project preparation and construction.
 - a. No.....MALAA. Consultation required.
 - b. Yes.....NLAA. Consultation complete. FWS-Townsend concurrence is needed, in writing, for JPNs, but is assumed for other Savannah District actions if FWS does not respond.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Red Knots and Piping Plovers For Shoreline Activities

- Do not disturb foraging or roosting red knot or piping plovers. The project area, including the operational site, access points, travel corridors, and staging areas, should be surveyed by a qualified biologist for the presence of these birds or for optimal habitat features (e.g., inlets, tidal flats, tidal pools, and wrack lines). Educate personnel on avoiding areas being utilized by the birds.
- Prohibit vehicle and foot traffic within 150 feet from red knot or piping plovers, or within 10 feet of optimal habitat features (even when birds are not present). Personnel and vehicles should follow existing established travel and access corridors and maintain slow speeds to avoid disturbing birds.
- Stay 500 feet or more away from roosting flocks of shorebirds, as red knots or piping plovers may occur in mixed flocks.
- Designate access points and travel corridors away from known foraging and roosting area and keep all personnel, vehicles, and equipment within those designated corridors.
- Avoid driving up and down the shoreline to minimize disturbance to birds and beach topographic alterations.
- Use low tire pressure (10 psi) or tracked vehicles (e.g., ATVs, dozers, etc.) to avoid and minimize beach topographic alterations.
- Locate staging and waste collection areas to avoid beaches, dunes, inlets, and ephemeral pools.
- Maintain a clean worksite and remove trash/work-related debris daily.
- Avoid disturbing the wrack line during project work or while traveling to and from the project site. If the wrack line must be crossed by equipment or vehicles, gently rake the wrack out of the way to establish a designated travel corridor. Restore the wrack to its original configuration once access is no longer needed.

- Avoid impacts to dune systems, both vegetated and non-vegetated, including trampling any dune vegetation. Use existing designated travel and access corridors at all times. If necessary, establish a buffer with flagging from the toe of the slope of the dune to a distance of 10 feet. Where vegetation extends off the dune onto the beach, the buffer should extend 10' from the vegetation.
- Do not fly aircraft or drones below 500' near bird concentration areas and avoid hovering or landing aircraft in these areas.
- Restore beach topography and the wrack line to their natural pre-project conditions to extent practicable.