

Piping Plover Fact Sheet

East Beach/Ninigret Conservation Area



Why the sand trail is closed

- The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management announced on June 1 that in order to provide protection for endangered piping plovers, public access to the East Beach/Ninigret Conservation Area Sand Trail will be restricted to pedestrian traffic only beginning at 4 p.m. Monday, June 1.
- Since plover adults have been observed using areas on and along the sand trail, the trail has been closed to vehicular use until nest hatches and the chicks have learned to fly, or “fledge”. The trail remains open to pedestrians.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers the Endangered Species Act, which prohibits the “taking” of any species of animal or plant listed as endangered or threatened. The Service is working closely with RI DEM to protect the plover adults and their nest.
- What does “take” mean? A taking is defined as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, hound, kill, trap, capture, collect, process, disrupt the nesting, breeding, feeding, or migratory activity or attempt to engage in any such conduct, or to assist such conduct.”
- To minimize the opportunity for a “take,” Federal guidelines require a minimum 110 yard protective buffer centered on the nest. Vehicle buffers are strictly dependent upon the level of monitoring and can range from 110 yards to 1100 yards.
- Winter storms and Hurricane Sandy eliminated vegetation in many areas along East beach, creating ideal nesting habitat for piping plovers. Prior to these storms, the thick vegetation between the beach and sand trail served as an effective barrier separating vehicular traffic and plover chicks.

About piping plovers

The Atlantic piping plover is a small, stocky, sandy-colored bird resembling a sandpiper. It was listed as a federally threatened species protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1986. This protection resulted in the USFWS Atlantic Piping Plover Recovery Program whose objective is ultimately to reach and maintain a plover population that will lead to the delisting of the species and focuses heavily on long-term management of plover habitat.

- Since being listed in 1986, piping plover numbers in the state have increased from 10 pairs to 77 pairs in 2014. The continued success of this program can be attributed to the many

partnerships between organizations, government agencies and landowners who all work together to protect this rare, charismatic shorebird!

- Piping plover's nest on the beach and in the dune area adjacent to the beach. These nests are nothing more than a small scrape in the sand that is often impossible to see or find. Eggs are also camouflaged and difficult to see.
- Plovers incubate their nests for 27-28 days.
- Piping plover chicks are mobile within hours of hatching and can travel hundreds of yards away, in some cases a mile, away from the nest in the first week of life.
- It can take Piping plover chicks 25-35 days to fledge, which means they are able to fly. Prior to flight, this is a critical time of protection that may cause vehicular beach closures and vehicle access restrictions. Until they can fly, chicks respond to vehicles, predators, and pedestrians by "freezing" and crouching down in the sand to hide, becoming almost perfectly camouflaged. Vehicle operators may accidentally run over and kill plover chicks without even knowing it! Some even get trapped in tire tracks, since they may be too little to get out and die from sun exposure and lack of food or a predator finds them.
- For further information regarding piping plover ecology and management, please contact the Refuge Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex at 401 364-9124.

Thank you for your patience, and help in protecting this Threatened Species!

