

Piping Plover

Recovery

Post Gulf Oil Spill World



USFWS

Background

The Northern Great Plains population of piping plovers has been listed as a threatened species since 1985. The breeding population extends from central Canada south to Nebraska. Piping plovers breed on the shorelines of alkali lakes in North Dakota and Montana, and on sandbar islands and shorelines on rivers and reservoirs throughout the breeding range. There are extensive and ongoing recovery efforts throughout the range, with crews placing predator-exclosure cages around nests so predators can't get to the eggs, manipulating habitat to make it suitable for nesting, working with more than 180 landowners with piping plovers breeding on their land, and reaching out to the public along rivers and reservoirs to explain the importance of avoiding nesting areas. Although recovery goals have not yet been reached, management efforts seem to be effective, and the population has been steadily increasing since 2002.



Most of the plovers from the Northern Great Plains population of piping plovers overwinter along the Gulf coast, making the oil spill a large unknown to the future of these birds. On the breeding grounds too, oil activity may impact these small shorebirds. Roughly one quarter to one third of the total Northern Great Plains population breeds in the area from central North Dakota into northeast Montana, an area which spans 10,000 square miles. The landscape in this area is changing rapidly due to the drilling and production of oil.



Piping plover chick / USFWS



Crew member placing predator enclosure cages around nests / USFWS

both parents help to incubate. The eggs hatch in about 28 days and the young leave the nest almost immediately. The chicks can feed themselves, eating small insects they find in the sand along the water's edge, but they still need parental protection to keep them warm and protect them from predators. Sometimes, the female heads south, leaving the male alone to take care of the chicks. By around 25 days, the chicks can fly, and soon begin their southern migration.

human disturbance are ongoing threats on the wintering grounds. Contamination from the oil spill along the Gulf coast may impact the food supply, reducing their survival. Researchers on the wintering grounds are monitoring piping plovers to see how the oil spill affects them during their stay.

Piping Plover Facts

Piping plovers nest on the ground on sandy/gravelly areas near water. The nest is a shallow bowl that both adults line with small stones. The female usually lays four eggs that

Piping plovers spend about three-quarters of their time on the wintering grounds, where they feed on shorelines, bays, and flats along the Gulf coast. Development and



Piping plover nest / USFWS

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