



North Great Plains Piping Plover

Draft Revised Recovery Plan Frequently Asked Questions

What is a piping plover?

The piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), named for its melodic call, is a small shorebird approximately seven inches long with sand-colored plumage on its back and crown and white underparts. The bird's light, sand-colored plumage blends in with the sandy beaches and gravel covered shorelines that are its primary habitat. Breeding birds have a single black breast band, a black bar across the forehead, bright orange legs and bill, and a black tip on the bill. During winter, the birds lose the black bands, the legs fade to pale yellow, and the bill becomes mostly black. Chicks are downy with a buff and grayish back with dark speckling on their heads, pale orange legs, and a white collar around the neck. Juveniles resemble wintering adults and obtain their adult plumage the spring after they fledge.

What is a recovery plan?

Recovery plans consolidate the best available scientific information on listed species and make recommendations on actions needed to achieve recovery. They guide conservation and habitat management activities to help listed species rebound to the point they no longer need the protection of the Endangered

Species Act. Recovery plans are usually developed by a recovery team that includes representatives of state and federal agencies, tribes, academic institutions, and private organizations.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks public review and comment on draft recovery plans before they are finalized. Recovery plans do not establish regulations or restrictions on activities such as land use and management. They do, however, play an important role in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's consultation with other federal agencies when their proposed actions have the potential to affect a listed species. Under the Endangered Species Act, federal agencies must avoid activities that jeopardize listed species or adversely modify areas of their designated critical habitat. The scientific information in recovery plans is often used to inform critical habitat designations as well.

What is the range of the Northern Great Plains population?

The breeding population of the Northern Great Plains piping plover extends from Nebraska north along the Missouri River through South

Dakota, North Dakota, and eastern Montana, and on alkaline (salty) lakes along the Missouri River Coteau (a large plateau extending north and east of the Missouri River) in North Dakota, Montana, and extending into Canada. They also breed in small numbers in Colorado and Minnesota and have been documented in Iowa and Kansas. The majority of piping plovers from Prairie Canada winter along the south Texas coast, while the U.S. breeding population is more widely distributed along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas.

How many piping plover populations are there?

Three. They are the Atlantic Coast, Great Lakes, and Northern Great Plains populations. These populations breed in three geographic regions of North America: beaches of the Atlantic Coast from South Carolina to Newfoundland, shorelines of the Great Lakes, and along alkaline wetlands and major rivers and reservoirs of the Northern Great Plains.

What is the current status of the piping plover?

Piping plovers were listed under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act on January 10, 1986. The Atlantic and Northern Great Plains populations are classified as threatened and the Great Lakes population is classified as endangered.

Critical habitat was designated on the Northern Great Plains breeding grounds on September 11, 2002. Critical habitat was designated for all populations of piping plovers on the wintering grounds on July 10, 2001, and redesignated in 2008 and 2009.



Piping plover at Lostwood Wetland Management District Complex / USFWS

What do the terms “threatened” and “endangered” mean?

An endangered species, as defined by the Endangered Species Act, is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A threatened species is one likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

What are the current threats facing this population?

In the Northern Great Plains, piping plovers breed and raise young on sparsely vegetated sandbars and reservoir shorelines on river systems as well as on the shorelines of alkaline lakes. Changes in the quality and quantity of riverine habitat due primarily to damming and water withdrawals are a primary threat to the species.

On the wintering grounds, piping plovers forage and roost along barrier and mainland beaches, sand, mud, and algal flats, washover passes, salt marshes, and coastal lagoons. Habitat destruction and degradation are pervasive and have reduced suitable habitat. Human disturbance, predation, and invasive plants further reduce breeding and wintering habitat quality and affect survival.

Why was the recovery plan revised for the NGP DPS of piping plover?

The original recovery plan for the Northern Great Plains population of piping plovers was completed in 1988. Since that time, there has been a great deal of research and monitoring on the species. This new information has allowed us to re-evaluate what is needed for piping plover recovery using the best available science and modeling techniques. The updated recovery plan incorporates demographic information from banding studies to model recovery needs. On the wintering grounds, the Service worked with partners to identify a much more comprehensive suite of actions to recover piping plovers. The Service regularly reviews recovery plans to ensure the most current information and best-available science is being considered in our actions to recover federally-listed species.

What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s goal with this recovery plan?

Our ultimate goal is to remove the Northern Great Plains population of piping plovers from the list of federally Threatened and Endangered Species and return management of the species to the states. We intend to restore and maintain a viable population of piping plovers (less than five percent likelihood of extinction in the next 50 years) in the Northern Great Plains by 2035. Our strategy to achieve this goal is to restore ecosystem function on both the breeding and wintering grounds so that the population can persist into the foreseeable future without extensive human intervention. Because some human activities are likely to continue to impact piping plover habitat, this task will likely involve developing and maintaining public outreach and education and partnerships for long-term protection and management.

What are the recovery criteria for the Northern Great Plains population?

To be considered for ESA delisting, wildlife managers will need to ensure that populations are stable or increasing over a 10-year average with enough habitat to keep the birds abundant and well distributed across their range. In addition, agreements must be in place to provide long-term conservation and management for essential breeding and wintering grounds. A more thorough description of the recovery criteria is found in the recovery plan.

Does the general public have input into the plan’s recovery criteria or proposed action items?

Yes, we are currently seeking public comment on the draft revised recovery plan. Comments may be submitted via email to: pipingplovercomments@fws.gov. The 60 day comment period extends from March 16, 2016 to May 14, 2016. Information received during the public comment period greatly helps the Service in revising this plan.

What impact will this plan have on private land?

Recovery plans do not regulate, restrict, or dictate any land uses. The

purpose of recovery plans is to identify a species’ greatest conservation needs and recommend the best ways to provide for them so that a listed species will no longer need Endangered Species Act protection.

Many of the Northern Great Plains piping plovers nest on private land near alkaline (salty) lakes in the U.S. and Canada. Managers in both countries work closely with willing landowners to monitor piping plovers and to identify and implement projects that benefit both landowners and plovers. These projects have included fencing, trash-pile removal, and conservation easements. Under the easement program, the Service pays willing landowners to permanently protect wetlands and grasslands. The property remains in private ownership and can still be used for a variety of purposes, but has some restrictions on it to ensure its continued value to wildlife.

Other options for private landowners include voluntary habitat conservation partnerships such as Safe Harbor agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans. These options are agreements between the Service and landowners that encourage landowners to take actions to benefit listed species without worrying about future additional restrictions if these actions draw in more listed species.

Where can I find more information on the Northern Great Plains population of piping plover?

Visit the species website at <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile?spcode=B079>.

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