

CITY OF PACIFICA  
Parks, Beaches and Recreation/Open Space Subcommittee  
2010

**SUBJECT:**

Western Snowy Plover Protection Recommendations for Pacifica State Beach

**ORIGINATED BY:**

A subcommittee of the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission and the Open Space Committee

**INTRODUCTION:**

In August 2009 Mayor Julie Lancelle formed a subcommittee to develop recommendations for the protection of shorebirds, particularly the Western Snowy Plover, on Pacifica State Beach. In an effort to develop a consensus on the issue, members of the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission, the Open Space Committee and Pacifica Organization of Canine Helpers (POOCH) were asked to serve on the subcommittee.

Subcommittee members:

August Murphy – Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission  
Julie Hartsell – Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission  
Noel Blincoe – Open Space Committee  
Victor Carmichael – Open Space Committee  
Beverly Kingsbury – POOCH  
Clark Natwick – Pacifica Environmental Family, Pacifica Beach Coalition

**BACKGROUND:**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has had the Pacific coast population of the Western Snowy Plover listed as threatened since 1993, and in 2007 published a federal recovery plan for the snowy plover. The plan is intended to serve as a guide for interested parties, such as federal, state, and local agencies as well as the general public and includes recommendations for Western Snowy Plover management measures. Its primary objective is to remove them from the endangered and threatened list (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2007, p. v, 3). Pacifica State Beach has been recognized as a wintering area, not a breeding habitat, where the snowy plover roost from July through April. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2007) habitat destruction is the main cause of the snowy plover's decline and happens through development on the beach, recreational conflicts and the introduction of non-native plant species (p. K-7). One major problem for the plovers is predators, actual or perceived, in the form of animals as well as humans. Food and litter left out by beachgoers attract predators such as ravens, crows, raccoons, skunks, feral cats and red foxes that all prey on the plovers. Human activities including hanging out in and/or traveling through the plover habitat as well as kite flying and Frisbee playing near the habitat are all perceived as threatening activities by the plovers. It is believed that most of these human offenders are ignorant to the fact that their actions are detrimental to these birds. Dogs, especially when unrestrained, can also cause a variety of impacts by disturbing or chasing plovers. Although there is a leash law in Pacifica, it is hard to enforce and, consequently, many owners let their dogs run free where they ultimately end up disturbing plover roosting areas.

Over the past several years there have been numerous discussions and meetings in the City of Pacifica regarding potential measures to provide protection for the shorebirds, most specifically the Western Snowy Plovers that congregate on Pacifica State Beach. Some suggestions have included increased signage to help educate the public, fencing of potential habitat areas and the regulation of dogs on the beach. It has also been suggested to ban dogs from the beach altogether. Others, however, have encouraged the local authorities to enforce the current leash laws more vigorously in order to protect the plovers.

**PROCESS:**

The subcommittee met monthly from August through December and almost bi-weekly from January through March. Early on the subcommittee acknowledged the plover as a very sensitive animal and identified a recommended approach of signage, education and fencing. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery plan for the Western Snowy Plover was made available as a resource to the subcommittee.

Edwin Greer, a Western Snowy Plover Volunteer at Half Moon Bay State Beach was a wealth of information regarding both the plover and Half Moon Bay's efforts to protect them. Edwin was a regular attendee at subcommittee meetings. Lynne Stenzel, Wetlands Ecologist from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), at the request of the Open Space Committee authored a list of management actions for the protection of snowy plovers at Pacifica State Beach. Sam Casillas of the Pedro Point Community Association (PPCA) presented a PPCA position paper with recommendations. Dyer Crouch also attended a meeting to report on the volunteer efforts at Pacifica State Beach, bird counts, impacts of flushing and observations and experiences at the beach.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Shore bird protection subcommittee formation memo (July, 2009).
- Management Recommendations for the Western Snowy Plover at Pacifica State Beach – PRBO (October, 2009).
- Recommendation/position paper concerning potential Western Snowy Plover habitat at Pacifica Mar State Beach – Pedro Point Community Association

**REFERENCES:**

- Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) Pacific Coast Population Recovery Plan – Volume 1 and 2 – U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Management Recommendations for the Western Snowy Plover at Pacifica State Beach – PRBO (October, 2009).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Recommendations to Protect Snowy Plovers from Excessive Disturbance:**

1. The Crespi Drive path from the Community Center parking lot passes through the area frequented by the plovers. Use symbolic (cable through eyes in metal posts) along the path to point foot traffic directly out toward the area to the south.
2. Install and maintain low but impassable fencing along the beach side of the bicycle path to discourage entry to the beach away from the primary beach access point. Fencing details need to be considered.
3. Install and maintain symbolic fencing (cable through eyes in metal posts) on the upper beach parallel to the water line in the vicinity of the primary roosting area, between the Crespi Drive path and the dry creek bed near the north end of the beach, to provide an area of minimal disturbance for the roosting flock.  
**Details on the fencing need to be worked out – how it is moved and specific location. The location of the fence running North-South on beach was not agreed upon.**
4. Enforce regulations prohibiting drinking, littering, fires, overnight camping, etc. and discourage the feeding of wildlife on the beach and provide predator-proof trash receptacles.
5. Discourage the feeding of wildlife, including feral cats and animals, on the beach and in the parking lots and provide predator-proof trash receptacles. Receptacles should be emptied daily.
6. Develop and implement training programs for enforcement personnel and others who work in snowy plover breeding habitat.

7. Provide informational signage and public outreach, as described below under recommendations #12-16 to discourage human behavior that creates excessive disturbance.

**Recommendations to Enhance, Restore, and Maintain Natural Beach Processes in the Coastal Strand Habitat of Snowy Plovers** – There are currently many efforts to provide for environmental sustainability at Pacifica State Beach, which should be encouraged to continue.

8. Remove invasive non-native beach plants.
9. Encourage the continued work of volunteer groups in the efforts to remove invasive non-native beach plants and to replant native plant species of the upper beach and coastal strand plant community.
10. Avoid coastal construction, including seawalls and groins, unless they can be engineered to avoid the long-term loss of sand from Pacifica State Beach.
11. Remove predator perches and unnatural habitats (e.g. bury riprap that may house black rats and feral cats).

**Recommendation for Partnerships and Public Outreach regarding Snowy Plovers at Pacifica State Beach**

12. Provide informational signage at the north parking lot and the Crespi entrance as well as other appropriate areas regarding plovers and provide information on what the public can do to reduce actual and potential impacts to the local plover population.
13. Post clear signage at access point(s) on Pacifica State Beach about dog regulations and fencing and prohibiting littering or feeding of wildlife.
14. Maintain existing relationships and encourage new ones with organizations and agencies that can provide advisory assistance with regard to protecting natural resources and working with federally listed species.
15. Establish and support a local working group, which could create a docent program for plover protection, take responsibility for monitoring the plover presence, and coordinate and communicate with the local Recovery Unit (Region 4) for the Western Snowy Plover. Monitor the efficacy of implementing management recommendations on Pacifica State Beach.
16. Prohibit feral cat feeding stations in the vicinity of the beach and educate landowners about the effects of feral cats on wildlife. Encourage adjacent landowners to secure food trash in wildlife/animal-proof receptacles and to feed pets indoors.

**The following items were discussed by the subcommittee with no consensus on the final recommendations.**

- Dogs on the beach – the PRBO recommendations were to restrict dogs from the beach completely. One half of the subcommittee felt that enforcing the existing leash laws on all areas of the beach was acceptable, and that dogs and people would not be allowed in designated protected areas (whether by fence or sign). The other members recommended restricting dogs altogether from the beach area north of Crespi to avoid any possible disturbance of plovers by dogs.  
Two main view points:
  - Restricting dogs from the north end of the beach (north of Crespi)
  - Allow dogs (always leashed per current law) on all areas of the beach, except for fenced off snowy plover areas (or near plover areas).
- Events that would bring vehicles or horses onto the beach or that would include fireworks – the PRBO recommendations were to restrict all of these activities. Part of the committee wanted to change this recommendation to read:

“Ensure that organizers of activities and events that would bring vehicles or horses onto the beach or that would include fireworks are properly educated concerning the well-being of the snowy plover.”

There were discussions highlighting the fact that any event would need to follow rules relating to beach usage including WSP/wildlife issues. There are policies in place governing event permits and any additional rules relating to plover protection would be incorporated into use permits. It was also noted that the usage of fireworks should be a separate recommendation. Other members felt that all of these activities needed to be restricted. As there was no consensus, a final recommendation relating to events with vehicles, horses and fireworks was not proposed.

- Kite-flying or over flights of hand gliders or kite surfers – the PRBO recommendation was to prohibit these activities, especially if plovers nest. Some members felt that this was not an issue at all, while others felt this recommendation should be accepted. Suggestions included not allowing kite flying on the beach north of Crespi, or not allowing kite flying near the snowy plover area. No consensus was reached on this issue and a final recommendation pertaining to kite-flying or over flights of hand gliders or kite surfers was not proposed.

**NEXT STEPS:**

After completion of this report, it will be presented to the Open Space Committee and the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission where it will be available for public input. Following the presentations it will be presented to City Council at a regular meeting.