

## OPRD issues western snowy plover advisory

March 14, 2023



The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and federal U.S. Forest Service are encouraging visitors to the Oregon Coast that it is plover nesting season — visitors can help recovery efforts for the threatened western snowy plover by sharing the beaches March 15 to Sept. 15.

Sensitive plover nesting areas will be roped off or identified by signs with rules and limits, such as staying on the wet sand, to help protect the small shorebirds and their exposed nests during this crucial period.

Plover beaches remain open to foot and equestrian traffic below the high-tide line on wet, packed sand throughout the nesting season. This ensures that plover nests, eggs and chicks are kept safe.

All other recreation on plover beaches is prohibited on both wet and dry sand, including walking a dog (even on a leash), driving a vehicle, riding a bicycle, camping, burning wood and flying kites or operating drones.

These small birds nest on open sand along Oregon's beaches. Nests, and especially chicks, are well-camouflaged. During the nesting season, human disturbances can flush adult plovers away from their nests as

they attempt to defend their young. Left alone too long, or too often, eggs or chicks can die from exposure, predators or people.

“We’re making great strides in reversing the decline of this species,” Siuslaw National Forest wildlife biologist Cindy Burns said. “But it takes all of us, so we urge people to do their part to understand nesting season rules and to share the beach this spring and summer.”

Recreation restrictions occur in designated plover management areas: small stretches of beach along the coastline where plovers nest or might nest. These areas combined make up about 40 miles of Oregon's 362 miles of shoreline.

“Visitors have access to hundreds of miles of beaches that have no seasonal restrictions,” OPRD Ocean Shore Specialist Laurel Hillmann said. “By planning your trip, you can enjoy the coast and help protect these special birds.”

More information on the snowy plover, including detailed maps of nesting sites, can be found on the Oregon State Parks website ([oregon.gov/plovers](http://oregon.gov/plovers)) and on the Siuslaw National Forest website. Visitors to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area can review maps at its website to identify unrestricted recreation areas and information on riding motor vehicles on the sand.

### **New plover activity**

The increase in plover numbers may result in nesting occurring in new or historical nesting sites. For example, visitors to Sand Lake Recreation Area may see small roped off areas near the lake’s inlet to protect active nests, and may encounter plovers on the beach. Beachgoers are encouraged to protect these birds by restricting recreation activities to wet sand areas, avoiding roped off nesting areas, packing all trash out and keeping dogs on leash.

### **Background about plover protections**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed western snowy plovers as a threatened species in 1993, when officials counted only 55 breeding adults. The numbers of breeding adults have steadily increased since then, from 107 in 2003 to 604 in 2021.

Several land managers oversee beach activity for plover protection, primarily the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD).

Habitat loss from invasive plants — as well as human disturbances, including litter and discarded food scraps that attract predators — have contributed to the birds’ decline.

The Oregon Dunes Restoration Collaborative, [saveoregondunes.org](http://saveoregondunes.org), is working with land managers on a restoration strategy and to raise public awareness about the need to restore the dunes ecosystem for western snowy plovers, rare plants and animals, and the unique recreation opportunities offered here.

