



Western Snowy Plover – *Charadrius nivosus nivosus*

Protection status: *Washington State endangered species listing*

Historically, breeding snowy plovers were found in at least five areas in Western Washington; however, there are now only three known active breeding grounds: the Damon Point/Oyhut Wildlife Area in Grays Harbor County, Midway Beach, and Ledbetter Point/Gunpowder Sands in Pacific County. All of these sites are federally designated critical habitats. Western snowy plovers occur in several western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming), but only members of the Pacific Coast population are listed as federally threatened.



Photo: M. L. Baird

Physical description

The western snowy plover is a small shorebird, about 6-inches long that has a thin dark bill, pale brown to gray upper parts, a white belly and forehead and darker patches on its shoulders and head. It also has black patches above its white forehead and behind the eye. The juvenile and winter plumages are similar to that of adults, but black patches are absent.

Life history

Snowy plovers have a life span of about 3 years, reaching sexual maturity after 1 year. The breeding season lasts from March to September, with the female laying two- to- three eggs annually in shallow scrapes or depressions in the sand. Pacific coast snowy plovers are polyandrous, meaning that females may breed with more than one male. Both parents share incubation duties. However, the females usually leave the chicks shortly after hatching, leaving the rearing duties to the male. The female may re-nest if another male is available and there is time remaining in the breeding season. Incubation by the males lasts for approximately one month, and the chicks fledge within 31 days. Adult plovers do not feed their chicks; rather, they lead them to suitable feeding areas.

Habitat use

Pacific snowy plovers prefer flat sandy areas with little or no vegetative cover, such as barrier beaches, dry lake beds and salt flats. They generally nest above high tide line on coastal beaches, sand spits, dune-backed beaches and sparsely vegetated dunes, along beaches at creek and river mouths, and on saltpans at lagoons and estuaries. They also may nest on bluff-backed beaches, dredge-spoil piles, salt-pond levees, dry salt ponds and river bars. They feed mainly on terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates such as brine flies, brine fly larvae and brine shrimp.

CONTACTS:

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Why are snowy plovers included in the Aquatic Lands HCP?

DNR's Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) addresses 29 species of animals that depend on submerged or intertidal lands for either all or a significant portion of their life history. Specific threats that warrant protection of snowy plovers include:

- Changes in habitat structure
- Increase in predation
- Decline in water and sediment quality
- Physical harm or harassment from covered activities

The Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the steward of more than 2.6 million acres of state-owned aquatic lands beneath Washington's navigational lakes, rivers, marine waters, and estuaries. DNR sustainably manages these aquatic lands on behalf of the people of the state—to protect fish and wildlife and to provide opportunities for commerce, navigation, and public access.

The increased demand for the use of aquatic lands can be harmful to aquatic habitats and species. To encourage a balanced approach to managing and protecting these lands, DNR is developing an **Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan** (HCP). The HCP will provide a framework for managing the aquatic lands under DNR's stewardship to ensure the continued health of our state's marine and fresh waters and the species that inhabit them.

Learn more

For more information about DNR's Aquatic Lands HCP and the other species that are covered in the plan, visit: www.dnr.wa.gov/aquaticHCP

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