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Wildlife
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**Invitation for Public Involvement
Environmental Assessment - Predator Damage Management
to Protect the Federally Threatened Pacific Coast Population
of the Western Snowy Plover in Oregon**

You are invited to participate in the planning process for the development of an Environmental Assessment to protect the Federally threatened Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) from predation. Several predator species including introduced red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), ravens (*Corvus corax*) and American crows (*C. brachyrhynchos*) threaten the survival of snowy plovers (USFWS 1993). Less than 100 nesting individuals are estimated along the Oregon coast (Castelein et al. 2000).

Why start now? The Need for Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act on April 5, 1993 (USFWS 1993). The threatened status means that further decline could ultimately place the population in danger of extinction.

In Oregon, predators have accounted for up to 68 percent of nest losses (Wilson-Jacobs and Meslow 1984, Stern et al. 1991). Between 1990 and 2000, The Nature Conservancy (2000) found that predation accounted for 155 incidences of nest failures, or 45.7% of all snowy plover nest failures along the Oregon Coast. The remaining losses were caused by weather (22.4%), biological factors (17.1%), unknown causes (12.7%) and direct human disturbances (2.0%) (The Nature Conservancy 2000). Biologists believe that some of the losses from unknown factors are probably the result of predation. Encroachment of introduced European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) is a major concern because it has reduced plover nesting habitat and provided cover for predators (USFWS 1993). Castelein et al. (2000) estimated that the numbers of western snowy plovers on the Oregon coast have fluctuated from 72 in 1993 to 141 in 1997 to 95-96 in 1999.

The USFWS, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Coos Bay District, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Siuslaw National Forest, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) have been working cooperatively together and with The Nature Conservancy to manage snowy plover habitat, recreation impacts, and

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predation impacts on plovers since the early 1990s. Recovery efforts to deter predation have included: removing vegetation to deter predators; erecting exclusionary cages around snowy plover nest sites to keep predators out; and removing non-native red foxes at one site. Predator losses remain at unacceptable levels to recover the species.

**What we want
to accomplish**

Objectives

The primary objective of this proposal is to improve the effectiveness of predator damage management to protect snowy plovers from decline due to predation while recreation and habitat management efforts continue. In order to achieve success in reducing predation, the lead and cooperating agencies plan to:

- 1) assess all plover breeding and nesting locations to determine predator species responsible for predation; and
- 2) reduce predation where predators have been identified as a threat to snowy plover conservation.

The primary snowy plover predators along the Oregon coast include red foxes, ravens, crows, skunks and raccoons. Secondary predators include feral cats, coyotes, gulls, mink, weasels, opossum, and raptors.

**What is the
decision to be
made?**

Decision to Be Made

The USFWS along with the USFS Siuslaw National Forest and the BLM Coos Bay District are lead agencies in this proposal. The Endangered Species Act requires all Federal agencies to use their authorities to enhance the recovery of Federally listed species, such as the snowy plover. The lead agencies together will address the following questions based on interdisciplinary analysis in the proposed Environmental Assessment.

- ! How can the lead agencies and their cooperating agencies best respond to the need for action to protect snowy plovers from further decline by predators?
- ! What might be the environmental effects of implementing various alternative strategies?

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What the lead agencies want to do

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to implement an integrated predator damage management program using the most effective, selective, and humane tools available to deter or remove the species responsible for predation of plovers. The following tools would be available as possible options:

Non-lethal tools could include any or all of the following depending upon the circumstances: relocation of live trapped animals; aversive methods that harass or deter predators such as pyrotechnics, electronic calls, repellants or effigies; electrified or non-electrified exclusionary nest site fencing; exotic vegetation removal; and trash management.

Lethal tools could include any or all of the following depending upon field circumstances: shooting; euthanasia in conjunction with cage traps, leg-hold traps, or nets; snares; denning; avicides (DRC 1339 or Avitrol); egg oiling; or predicides (sodium cyanide).

Who are the cooperating agencies?

Cooperating Agencies

Besides the lead agencies, this proposal would require the participation of other agencies that have management authority and expertise related to this project. The OPRD is responsible for regulating activities on the ocean shore and managing beach parks where some of the snowy plovers are known to nest. The lead agencies, ODFW and the COE are responsible for managing plover habitat. The ODFW has the authority to manage resident wildlife. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services program is authorized by Federal law to provide leadership and assistance in wildlife damage management. In addition, the lead agencies would continue to use the expertise of The Oregon Natural Heritage Program to monitor snowy plover nesting success and distribution.

Where would the project occur?

The selected actions could occur at or around any or all active or potential breeding, nesting, or foraging sites along the Oregon coast. These currently include Sutton, Siltcoos, Overlook, Tahkenitch, Tenmile, Coos Bay North Spit, Bandon, New River, and Floras Lake. These sites are located on lands managed by the BLM, USFS, ODFW, OPRD, and COE, as well as some

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private lands. Current sites are located in Lane, Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties. Clatsop and Tillamook counties may also be included in the scope of analysis because of new or historic nesting sites. For example, Bay Ocean Spit, a site managed by COE in Tillamook County, is an historic nesting site, and Necanicum Spit in Clatsop County may be a newly active site.

**Areas of
Concern**

Issues that would drive the analysis

Issues drive the analysis and are used to compare the environmental impacts of the various management strategies. The lead and cooperating agencies have determined that the following issues may be important for the analysis. These questions and/or others may be answered in the Environmental Assessment.

- ! How effective might the various alternative strategies be in protecting the snowy plover from predation? How do they compare in meeting the objectives of the proposal? What is the anticipated response of plover populations to the different predator damage management alternatives?
- ! What would be the impacts on predator populations? How would the management strategies affect local or regional populations of red foxes, ravens, crows and other predators?
- ! What potential non-target impacts could occur by implementing the various alternatives? Would any of the strategies adversely affect human safety or pets?
- ! How do the public and technical experts perceive the humaneness of the various lethal and non-lethal methods?
- ! What effects might the proposal have on the aesthetic values that wildlife offer to recreationists or residents?
- ! How might the alternative actions affect recreation or other land uses?
- ! What would be the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposal?

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What else could be done? Alternatives to the Proposed Action

1. No Action. This alternative would maintain the status quo, and not involve *additional* action. This can be thought of as the current program alternative. It consists entirely of efforts that are being made now: removing beachgrass to reduce cover for predators; managing trash removal to decrease attractants of predators; and building exclusionary fencing around nest sites to protect nesting plovers and their eggs.
2. Non-lethal methods only. This alternative would allow for only non-lethal methods to prevent or deter predators from active nesting and breeding sites. Any or all of the non-lethal efforts that are listed under the proposed action could be used.
3. Non-lethal before lethal. This alternative would require that lethal methods be used only if nonlethal methods are used first, but are found to be ineffective or not practical. Any or all of the non-lethal methods that are listed under the proposed action alternative could be used, and in theory, any or all of the lethal methods could also be used afterwards.

Based on comments obtained through this public involvement process, other alternatives and issues may be included in this analysis, or the alternatives and issues listed above may be modified.

How to get involved

We encourage you to help by answering the following questions. All of the information we receive will be considered in the analysis process:

1. What is your relationship (recreationist, concerned citizen, etc.) to the proposed project or to the potential environmental impacts of predator damage management to protect the western snowy plover?
2. What *issues* do you think are important to consider in this analysis? What are your concerns with predator damage management and protecting snowy plovers?

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3. How do you desire and expect snowy plover predation to be managed? Which *alternatives* (management strategies) should we consider for resolving snowy plover predation?

We invite you to send written comments on the proposal to the address below. Because time is of the essence, **comments should be received by Monday, November 6, 2000** to ensure full consideration in the Environmental Assessment. Faxed comments should also be mailed. We will send you a predecisional environmental assessment for review if we receive your comments or an indication of your interest to remain informed. Please be sure to include your return address on your correspondence.

**Where to send
comments**

Address comments to:
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Thank you for taking the time to read this notice. We look forward to receiving your comments. Your contribution will help the lead agencies make the best possible decision on protecting the threatened Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover from further decline due to predators.

References

Castelein, K. A., D. J. Lauten, K. J. Popper, J. A. Fukuda, and M. A. Stern. 2000. Snowy plover distribution and reproductive success along the Oregon coast - 1999. A report by the Oregon Natural heritage program submitted to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Coos Bay District Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, TMM Co., LTD, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 43 pp.

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Stern, M.A., J. S. McIver, and G. A. Rosenberg. 1991. Nesting and reproductive success of snowy plovers along the south Oregon coast, 1991. Report to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife-Nongame, Roseburg, OR and Coos Bay District, Bureau of Land Management, North Bend, OR. 18 pp.

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