

# News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 28, 2002

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## Snowy Plovers Get Priority Protection As Nesting Season Begins

State Park Rangers at Oceano Dunes are now reporting that the threatened snowy plover shore birds are becoming more aggressive and are beginning to pair up. Because of that, thousands of feet of protective fencing are now in place at the State Vehicular Recreation Area for the Friday (March 1) start of the seven-month-long nesting season.

"Their protection is vital. We constantly seek a balance to keep Oceano Dunes open to the public while at the same time increase the protection of wildlife," said District Superintendent Steve Yamaichi.

The western snowy plover shorebird was listed in 1993 as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Each year, as the nesting season begins, nesting sites for the snowy plover and the endangered California least tern, both of which nest on the bare sands within the SVRA, are protected by fenced enclosures.

The nests are monitored daily, and movement of western snowy plover chicks, a tiny, pale-colored shorebird with dark patches on either side of the upper breast, is monitored up and down the coast. Individual nests found outside the large enclosures are usually fenced off within a half-hour of being located. Signs are posted to advise visitors to stay out of enclosure areas.

The Division has conducted an ongoing monitoring program since 1991. However, the Division contracted in 2001 with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory for supervision and coordination of all monitoring activities at Oceano Dunes in order to obtain the most accurate data possible.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that 2,000 of the birds breed solely along the Pacific Coast from southern Washington to Baja California, Mexico.

In a milestone action, California's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission awarded \$200,000 to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on February 13, 2002 to conduct snowy

plover monitoring programs in lands adjoining Oceano Dunes and in other recovery units of the state.

While similar grants have been awarded other agencies, the grant represents the first time in the Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Program's 30-year history that the Fish and Wildlife Service has been awarded off-highway vehicle funds for the benefit of wildlife research and management.

As part of an ongoing education program, each visitor to Oceano Dunes is given a flyer reminding them that their future access to the park is dependent on their responsible behavior and strict adherence to laws and park policies. Rangers rigorously enforce vehicle speed limits on the beach, as well as violations of litter and dog leash laws and see that visitor activities do not disturb these sensitive species.

In addition, permanent interpretative signs have been posted at the Pier and Grand Avenue entrances that describe the least tern and snow plover population status and the threats to their survival.

Oceano Dunes is one of California's most popular State Parks, attracting more than 1.2 million visitors annually—more than the famed Hearst Castle—who come to the park to fish, surf, beachcomb, ride horses, view wildlife, and enjoy off-highway vehicle recreation. Except for a small stretch of sand at the Samoa Peninsula in northern California, Oceano Dunes represents the last 5-½ miles of beach along California's 1,100 miles of coastline where motorized recreation is still allowed.

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