



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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**OHMVR COMMISSION MEETING
Sacramento, CA 95816**

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STAFF REPORT: Oceano Dunes SVRA – Snowy Plover and Least Tern Management Program

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SUBJECT: Oceano Dunes SVRA Western Snowy Plover and California Least Tern Management Program

Summary

Since 2001, the OHMVR has implemented an adaptive management program to provide for the successful nesting of western snowy plover (federally listed threatened) and California least tern (state and federally listed endangered and state fully protected species) at Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA). This presentation will provide an update of activities during the 2020 nesting season.

Discussion

Background: The snowy plover and least tern management program has evolved to be one of the most successful programs on the West Coast. Each year, approximately 300 acres of Oceano Dunes SVRA are closed to all public activity during the nesting season (March 1-September 30). The southern enclosure is surrounded by a 6-foot-tall predator fence that is maintained throughout the year by hand and with heavy equipment. Parks staff implement habitat enhancement to make these seasonally closed areas more productive for plover and tern nesting by placing woody debris, wood chips, and surf cast kelp in the closed area.

During the nesting season, staff monitor the entire SVRA for evidence of nesting behavior. Any nest found outside the enclosure area is protected with a single nest enclosure in consultation with state and federal wildlife agencies. Staff monitor nests regularly and adjust protective measures as needed. Chicks are banded to help track their development and to determine fledge rates.

This management program also includes a robust public outreach and educational program to advise the public on plover and tern conservation.

This program has been extremely successful at protecting nesting shorebirds while balancing high quality off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. Oceano Dunes SVRA consistently contributes to the recovery of these species.

Snowy Plover – The breeding adult population of snowy plovers has increased from 32 individuals in 2002 to over 200 individuals during the 2018 and 2019 nesting seasons. This represents a 600% increase in breeding adult plovers at the site. From 2002-2019, the average annual chick fledged per breeding male is 1.47 which exceeds the recovery target that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has established for this species. This increase in breeding adults and fledgling success has made Oceano Dunes SVRA one of the most productive breeding sites in the state.

Least Tern – Although Oceano Dunes SVRA is a relatively small least tern nesting colony, it consistently has some of the highest chick productivity seen throughout the range of the species. The site consistently fledges more than one chick per breeding pair. From 2004 through 2019, Oceano Dunes SVRA produced more than 65% of all the chicks that fledged from all breeding sites in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. This is remarkable considering all of the available nesting habitat within these two Counties.

Costs – The snowy plover and least tern management program at Oceano Dunes SVRA is funded entirely out of OHV Trust Funds. Annual costs exceed \$2,000,000 including all of the staff time, equipment, materials, and ongoing department assets allocated to the program.

Update: In March 2020, Oceano Dunes SVRA was closed to all public vehicle activity due to restrictions from COVID-19. During this closure, snowy plover and least tern have expanded nesting into areas that are usually open to OHV recreation and camping. This change in nesting behavior has presented unique challenges for park operations and for public access at the site.

Commission Action

For information only.

Attachments

None