

# National Park Service

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Cape Hatteras

National Seashore

### NEWS

#### TIP OF HATTERAS SPIT TO BE TEMPORARILY CLOSED

**Date**

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**Contact**

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Due to the immediately impending hatch of piping plover chicks, the National Park Service will be temporarily closing the Off-Road Vehicle Use Area on the southern tip of Hatteras Spit starting approximately 1/2 mile from the end of the Spit at Hatteras Inlet, on Hatteras Island. This closure will encompass the ocean, inlet, and soundside beaches south of the closure line, to allow for foraging piping plover chicks and their parents.

This closure will be in effect beginning Thursday, May 27, 2004 and will be marked by signed posts and string.

The piping plover is a Federally listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This closure follows ESA guidance for managing the protection of piping plover chicks.

This closure will be very closely monitored and adjusted south as foraging behavior changes. The area will be closed to all use, including vehicles, pedestrians, boat landings, and dogs.

The ORV Use Area will be reopened when fledging is completed. Piping plover chicks fledge (are able to fly) at 25 to 35 days of age. Piping plover chicks are able to run when newly hatched, and may move hundreds of yards from the nest site during their first week of life.

The ESA prohibits harassing, harming, pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing, or collecting federally protected species. Penalties for violation of the ESA for threatened species include a fine of up to \$25,000, imprisonment for not more than six months, or both.

Statistics of piping plover chick fledging at Cape Hatteras National Seashore show that from a high of twelve chicks fledged out of twenty hatched in 1998, the number of fledged chicks has declined. Last year, only one chick fledged, out of five hatched. Numbers of breeding pairs

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of piping plover and nests have also declined.

Piping plovers are small, sand-colored shorebirds that nest on sandy, coastal beaches from South Carolina to Newfoundland. Since 1986, the Atlantic Coast population has been protected as a threatened species under provisions of the ESA. Many characteristics of piping plover contribute to their susceptibility to impact due to human beach activities.

Piping plover nests are situated above the high tide line on coastal beaches, sand flats at the end of sandspits and barrier islands, gently sloping foredunes, blowout areas behind primary dunes, and washover areas cut into or between dunes. Nest sites are shallow scraped depressions in the sand.

Feeding activities of chicks may be particularly important to their survival. Piping plover chicks typically triple their weight during the first two weeks post-hatching. Feeding activities of both adults and chicks occur during all hours of the day and night and at all stages of the tidal cycle.

Typical behavior of piping plover chicks increases their vulnerability to vehicles. Chicks frequently move between the upper berm or foredune and feeding habitats in the wrack line and intertidal zone. These movements place chicks in the paths of vehicles driving along the berm or through the intertidal zone. Chicks stand in, walk, and run along tire ruts, and sometime have difficulty crossing deep ruts or climbing out of them. Chicks sometime stand motionless or crouch as vehicles pass by, or do not move quickly enough to get out of the way. Chicks typically leave the nest within a day after hatching and move extensively along the beach to feed.

Piping plover, as well as other migratory birds such as least terns, common terns, American oystercatchers, laughing gulling, herring gulls, and great black-backed gulls, their nests, and eggs are also protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Violators may be fined up to \$5,000 and/or imprisoned for up to six months.

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