

0031987

From: [Cyndy Holda](#)
To: [Kirby Adams](#)
Bcc: [Mike Murray](#)
Subject: Requested Information
Date: 01/09/2012 12:22 PM
Attachments: [010912 Response to Adams.docx](#)

Kirby,

Now that several key staff members have returned to work following the holidays, we have compiled the answers to your questions. Hope you had a pleasant holiday season and that this information is helpful to you.
Please see attached.



010912 Response to Adams.docx

Feel free to give me a call if you need further assistance.

Cyndy M. Holda
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▼ [Kirby Adams <kirby.adams@gmail.com>](mailto:kirby.adams@gmail.com)

Kirby Adams
<kirby.adams@gmail.com>

To: Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov
cc

12/15/2011 10:15 AM

Subject: Re: Fw: From NPS.gov: Piping Plovers

Hi Cyndy,

I'm working with a fluid deadline, so there's no serious issue with waiting for Britta's return. If anyone else wants to comment on the following, they're certainly welcome. (I don't think there should be any litigation that precludes comment on any of this, but I certainly understand if there is.)

Some brief background on this assignment: As you're surely aware, piping plover management has been the subject of much contention, particularly in North Carolina. At [National Parks Traveler](#) the plover stories lead to robust and sometimes adversarial discussions. That struck me as odd, given that the piping plover closures I've encountered here in the Great Lakes (Sleeping Bear and Apostle Islands) seem to be less aggressive, yet quite effective. The

editor at NPT assigned me to find out why there is such a divergence of methods and how those methods have evolved at individual parks. With that in mind, I have four questions below. Feel free to add any additional thoughts, provided you don't mind them repeated in the article.

*Are the Piping Plover nesting closures a standard distance from a nest, or is it on a case-by-case basis?

*How are the closures (distance, length of time, etc.) determined? Are precedents from other U.S. conservation efforts used as guidelines? USFWS involved with this at all?

*What is the typical visitor activity in the Plover nesting areas, and is this a factor in determining size of closures? (swimming, hiking, camping, off-road vehicle use)

*Have there been any issues with the closures? (complaints from the public, repeated violation, difficulty in monitoring)

Thanks for your time! There's no immediate rush, as we're on a fluid deadline.

Kirby

On Wed, Dec 14, 2011 at 9:24 AM, <Cyndy_Holda@nps.gov> wrote:

Hello Kirby!

I do not recall receiving a response from you and am just checking to see if there is anything else we can do to assist in the information gathering you need until our Wildlife Biologist returns to the park in January?

Feel free to call and discuss the project you are working on. The more details I can gather, the more we may be able to help you when staff are back in position to assist. Thank you for your interest in Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Cyndy M. Holda
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0031989

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----- Forwarded by Cyndy Holda/CAHA/NPS on 12/14/2011 09:22 AM -----

Cyndy
Holda/CAHA/NPS

12/09/2011 08:31 AM To
kirby.adams@gmail.com
cc

Jami P Lanier/CAHA/NPS@NPS

Subject

Re: Fw: From NPS.gov: Piping
Plovers(Document link: Cyndy Holda)

Kirby,
Britta Muiznieks, our wildlife biologist, would be the best person to answer your questions. Unfortunately, she is away on annual leave until January 3, 2012. (Many NPS staff have "use-or-lose" annual leave situations this time of year.) If you need the information before Britta returns, please provide me with a list of questions and I'll coordinate with the available park staff to come up with some answers.

Thank you for your interest in Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Cyndy M. Holda
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----- Forwarded by Jami P Lanier/CAHA/NPS on 12/08/2011 12:27 PM -----

-

kirby.adams@gmail
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To

12/08/2011 11:47
AM

caha_information@nps.gov

cc

Subject

From NPS.gov: Piping Plovers

Email submitted from: kirby.adams@gmail.com at /caha/contacts.htm

I've been assigned a story for National Parks Traveler concerning conservation efforts for Piping Plovers, comparing methods among U.S. National Parks along the Atlantic Coast and the Great Lakes. I don't intend to fuel the current controversy, but rather enlighten the readers about the reasoning behind the differing approaches. Is there someone at Cape Hatteras National Seashore that would be able to do a brief interview via phone or email about Piping Plover conservation methods specific to the park? Thank you! Kirby Adams

***Are the Piping Plover nesting closures a standard distance from the nest, or is it on a case-by-case basis?**

The Piping Plover Revised Recovery Plan for the Atlantic coast population states that “a 50-meter buffer distance will be adequate to prevent harassment of the majority of incubating piping plovers”. Under the consent decree, standard nest buffers for piping plovers at Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) were 50 meters. The size of some actual buffers on the ground may be larger because they often merge or intersect with buffers for other nesting bird species in the area. Under the management guidelines of the ORV Management Plan scheduled for implementation in 2012, the nest buffers for piping plovers will increase to 75 meters¹ to ensure the adequacy of the nest buffer.

***How are the closures (distance, length of time, etc.) determined? Are precedents from other U.S. conservation efforts used as guidelines? USFWS involved with this at all?**

An annual habitat assessment is conducted at the beginning of each breeding season to determine where pre-nesting closures will be installed. In general, the areas that are protected will include the previous five years of known nesting sites. The pre-nesting closures are installed by March 15th and expanded as necessary to maintain the minimum buffer distances when the breeding birds arrive and establish their territories and/or nest. They are expanded again when the nests hatch and chicks are on the ground. Closures are removed or modified after breeding activity in an area has ceased or when all chicks of all species have fledged from an area.

The buffers utilized are consistent with the recommendations from USFWS's Recovery Plan for the Atlantic Coast Population of Piping Plovers. The USFWS was formally consulted on for CAHA's Interim Protected Species Management Strategy/Environmental Assessment as well as on CAHA's Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement scheduled for implementation in February 2012.

¹ Appendix G of the Piping Plover Recovery Plan states: Available data indicate that a 50 meter buffer distance around nests will be adequate to prevent harassment of the majority of incubating piping plovers. However, fencing around nests should be expanded in cases where the standard 50 meter-radius is inadequate to protect incubating adults or unfledged chicks from harm or disturbance. Data from various sites distributed across the plover's Atlantic Coast range indicates that larger buffers may be needed in some locations. This may include situations where plovers are especially intolerant of human presence, or where a 50 meter-radius area provides insufficient escape cover or alternative foraging opportunities for plover chicks. For example, on the basis of data from an intensive three year study that showed that plovers on Assateague Island in Maryland flush from nests at greater distances than those elsewhere (Loegering 1992), the Assateague Island National Seashore established 200 meter buffers zones around most nest sites and primary foraging areas (NPS 1993b). Following a precipitous drop in numbers of nesting plover pairs in Delaware in the late 1980's, that State adopted a Piping Plover Management Plan that provided 100 yard buffers around nests on State park lands and included intertidal areas (DNREC 1990).

***What is the typical visitor activity in the Plover nesting areas, and is this a factor in determining size of closures? (swimming, hiking, camping, off-road vehicle use)**

CAHA has a long history of high levels of ORV and recreational use (including surf fishing, beachcombing, watersports, and pets) in the limited number of locations that provide suitable nesting habitat for piping plovers, which is typically near the inlets and Cape Point. Closure sizes have been developed to minimize all types of disturbance to breeding/nesting plovers and their chicks. Pedestrians as well as off-road vehicles are capable of disturbing plovers. Smaller closures are adequate for protecting incubating and foraging plovers from disturbance, while larger closures are necessary for protecting recently hatched (i.e. difficult to observe), but highly mobile chicks. CAHA staff strives to minimize pedestrian, ORV, and pet disturbance to piping plovers while still allowing access when possible.

Have there been any issues with the closures? (complaints from the public, repeated violation, difficulty in monitoring)

There have been numerous documented violations to our bird closures in the past few years including breaking, burning, defacing, and shooting signs; vehicles, pedestrians and pets entering closures; and disturbing birds and/or approaching nests/chicks. Some of the fishing public do not understand the need for the closures and think the size is excessive especially when a closure is blocking access to their favorite fishing hole.

It is common for the public to voice their opinions (good and bad) while we are conducting our monitoring, especially when we are entering and leaving closures. The public often does not understand why resource management staff is allowed into the closures for monitoring while the area remains off-limits to them.