

# News Release



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## California State Parks Expands Recovery Effort for Western Snowy Plover Local Beaches to Face Strict Enforcement

The California Department of Parks and Recreation is asking for public cooperation as it enforces regulations on state beaches as part of an expanding effort to protect the western snowy plover, a shorebird listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Department will limit disruption of public use as much as possible, but at the same time maximize its protective efforts for the threatened shorebird.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife's draft recovery plan lists many state beaches along the San Mateo Coast as critical habitat for the management of the western snowy plover. Due to the critical decline of the western snowy plover and threats to other shorebirds, the Department of Parks and Recreation has rescinded authorization that had permitted dogs on San Mateo County State Beaches. Section 4312 of the California Code of Regulations prohibits dogs on state beaches in California. Dogs near snowy plovers can frighten adult plovers into abandoning nests or chicks. They also pose a threat to plovers and other shorebirds in non-nesting habitat. While nests are usually located at the upper end of a beach, the chicks will range from the edge of the dunes all the way down to the waterline.

State Parks will strictly enforce regulations prohibiting dogs on State Beaches. Rangers will also enforce all regulations banning horses, camping, motorized vehicles, fireworks, and fires on beaches. Bans on removing natural features such as driftwood will also be enforced. State Parks also requests cooperation from beach goers to refrain from flying kites near nesting areas, as hovering kites resemble predators such as hawks, and may cause nest abandonment.

The new rules do not prohibit leashed dogs in State Park campgrounds, picnic areas, parking areas or roads. Dogs on-leash are also allowed on Montara State Beach, Bean Hollow State Beach, the Coastal Trail and other beaches in Half Moon Bay not owned by the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The western snowy plover is a sparrow-sized, pale-colored shorebird that breeds along the Pacific Coast from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The coastal population of the bird is listed by the federal government as threatened due to a serious decline in breeding numbers, mainly as a result of loss of suitable habitat and disturbance by people.

Snowy plovers nest on open, sandy beaches along much of the coastline from early spring to mid-fall. State Beaches provide essential nesting habitat for plovers, and at a time of the year that typically coincides with highest visitor use. Wintering habitat is also an important element of the recovery plan. Snowy plovers inhabit open beaches during the winter season to forage and build fat reserves that improve nesting success during the breeding season. Because of this, proper stewardship and protection of nesting and wintering areas on State Beaches by California State Parks is vital to the recovery of the species.

State Parks' new policies and restrictions are part of a systemwide management program developed following a report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that identified 62 locations in California with specific goals for breeding bird numbers. Forty-four of those locations included some State Park property.

Half Moon Bay State Beach has been identified as "Critical Habitat" for the snowy plover. Other State Beaches in San Mateo County have been identified as recovery habitat: San Gregorio State Beach, Pomponio State Beach, Pescadero State Beach, Gazos Creek Access, and Año Nuevo State Reserve.

The Department has been implementing site protection and enforcement at many plover nesting areas for years. However, more areas will be afforded protection by the expanded effort set forth in the new management program.

Western snowy plovers in the State Park system are being monitored and a variety of measures are being implemented to improve the success of the species. Protection measures include increased monitoring of wintering populations of snowy plovers, erecting temporary informational and warning signs near nest sites during the breeding season, fencing or roping off nesting areas, and educating beachgoers to the sensitive nature of the area. Three active nesting sites at Half Moon Bay State Beach are currently fenced.

In addition to increasing the protection and enforcement of existing regulations, State Parks will increase educational efforts to inform visitors of the precarious status of plovers and of the importance of actions aimed at recovering viable plover populations. The Department's efforts to protect western snowy plover nesting areas and restore coastal habitat in general date back more than 25 years.

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