

Recommendations for 2011

Pre-nesting Closures

NPS Natural Resource staff conducted an annual assessment of piping plover (PIPL) breeding habitat on February 14-15, 2011.

The pre-nesting closure recommendations are based on habitat conditions at the time of the assessment and consideration of PIPL breeding activity in recent years. As stated in the Interim Protected Species Management Strategy Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the pre-nesting closures provide for continued recreational use and access consistent with required management of protected species. These closures will meet the requirements to provide protection from adverse impacts related to recreational uses as required by laws and policies, such as the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the NPS Organic Act, and NPS *Management Policies 2006*. These recommendations are also intended to meet the requirements of the consent decree, which states that “In the years following the 2008 breeding season, NPS shall establish pre-nesting closure areas at Bodie Island Spit, Cape Point, South Beach, Hatteras Spit, North Ocracoke, and Ocracoke South Point that incorporate to the maximum extent possible the areas delineated in the 2008 pre-nesting closure maps.” Pre-nesting areas will be established by March 15, 2011. Due to the Park’s dynamic shoreline and breeding/nesting by additional bird species, subsequent modifications will likely result in the expansion of the proposed pre-nesting closures. Following are the recommendations for the 2011 pre-nesting closures.

Bodie Island

Recent PIPL Breeding History: No PIPL pairs or PIPL nests were documented on Bodie Spit in 2010. A number of PIPL scrapes, thought to be made by an unpaired bird, were documented in the flats south of the dunes.

Observations: Areas near the small dunes on the southeast side of the spit have eroded, however, a 100-foot ORV and pedestrian corridor is still feasible through this area. Following the shoreline south and then west toward the Bonner Bridge, the spit has accreted and is protruding further into Oregon Inlet.

Recommendation: See Map 1 for Bodie Island Spit. The pre-nesting closure will begin 0.6 mi south of Ramp 4 (at the northern tip of the large over wash area) and a 100-foot corridor will allow access along the ocean and inlet shoreline around the tip of the spit to an area near the Bonner Bridge (approximately 1.9 miles south of Ramp 4). A narrow pedestrian corridor, parallel to the Bonner Bridge, will allow pedestrians to access the Bait Pond.

Cape Point

Recent PIPL Breeding History: In 2010 the Park documented six PIPL pairs and six PIPL nests at Cape Point. All six of the pairs at Cape Point successfully fledged young.

Observations: The Point continues to be a dynamic landform. During the habitat assessment it was observed that the Salt Pond drainage was about to flow out into the ocean just west of “the Hook” in a location that appears to be similar to that of recent years.

Recommendation: See Map 2 for Cape Point. The Cape Point pre-nesting closure will be similar to the pre-nesting closures installed in 2008, 2009 and 2010. From Ramp 44 to the Point there will be a 100-foot ORV and pedestrian corridor. The area to the east of the By-pass Road (especially at the southern end) may be difficult to pass through during some high tides but should be passable the majority of the time. Because of the location of the PIPL nests in 2009 and 2010, the By-pass Road will remain closed. The eastern side of the Cape Point pre-nesting closure will end as near as possible to the location it has been for the past several years and will allow for some access to the west of the Point (approximately 0.4 miles). Approximately 0.9 miles of shoreline to the west of the Hook will be closed to ORVs and pedestrians. The western end of the full beach closure will end near the halfway point between Salt Pond Ramp and Ramp 45 (approximately 300 meters east of Ramp 45). Salt Pond Ramp will be closed to ORVs and pedestrians. A 100-foot ORV and pedestrian corridor will begin approximately 300 meters east of Ramp 45.

South Beach

Recent PIPL Breeding History: In 2010 the Park documented one PIPL pair and one nest at South Beach, as well as a loner male. The pair did not fledge any young.

Recommendation: See Map 3 for South Beach. On South Beach, approximately 1.4 miles of the upper beach (100 feet above high tide) west of Ramp 45, will be closed to ORVs and pedestrians.

Hatteras Spit Overwash Fans

Recent PIPL Breeding History: No PIPL nests have ever been documented in this area. In 2006 PIPLs were documented scraping and foraging within the currently proposed pre-nesting area. In 2007 PIPLs were observed foraging on the sound-side and ocean-side, however, there has been no nesting activity by any species in this closure since 2007.

Recommendation: See Map 4 for Overwash Fans. Since there has not been any recent breeding activity in this area, resource management staff is recommending a similar closure as in previous years with the exception that the Pole Road will remain open to ORVs. The area will be monitored as described in the consent decree and the prescribed buffers would be implemented if breeding activity is observed. The soundside mud flats are a preferred foraging area for many species throughout the year and will not be accessible to ORVs and pedestrians.

Hatteras Inlet Spit

Recent PIPL Breeding History: There has not been a PIPL nest documented at Hatteras Inlet since 2005.

Observations: Erosion continues to take its toll on the inlet habitat and shoreline. While there is potential habitat, plovers have not been choosing this area for nesting or setting up territories in recent years.

Recommendation: See Map 5 for Hatteras Inlet. The full beach closure will begin just west of the Pole Road exit (approximately 2.2 miles west of Ramp 55), continue around the spit and end where

the Spur Road intersects with the sound. Approximately 0.4 miles of shoreline (including the inlet shoreline) will be closed to ORVs and pedestrians.

North Ocracoke

Recent PIPL Breeding History: Prior to 2010, the last time nesting was documented on North Ocracoke was in 1996 when two flightless PIPL chicks were observed. The actual nest location for the pair was not documented. In 2010, for the first time since 1996, one PIPL nest was documented, however, no chicks fledged from this nest.

Observations: The spit on the north end of Ocracoke is accreting and is much wider than in 2010. A high potential for nesting exists for the elevated shell beds at the toe of the dunes as well as on the accreted sand/mud flats.

Recommendation: See Map 6 for North Ocracoke. The pre-nesting closure on North Ocracoke Spit will start just east of Ramp 59. A 100-foot ORV and pedestrian corridor will extend for approximately 0.9 miles along the ocean and inlet shoreline. A pedestrian corridor will extend for an additional 0.1 miles of shoreline beyond the ORV corridor to the north. The pre-nesting closure will include the large mud flats that extend beyond the vegetated area on the north end of Ocracoke and include the accreting area of the spit.

South Point Ocracoke

Recent PIPL Breeding History: In 2010 four PIPL pairs and seven PIPL nests were documented on South Point. None of the pairs fledged any young.

Observations: Little to no change in the habitat was observed from this time last year. Potential nesting habitat appears to be abundant and available for additional pairs to occupy.

Recommendation: See Map 7 for South Ocracoke. The pre-nesting closure will begin 0.3 mi southwest of Ramp 72 and a 100-foot ORV and pedestrian corridor will allow access along the ocean and part of the inlet shoreline. The full beach closure will start approximately 2.5 miles southwest of Ramp 72 (or 0.3 miles southeast of where Ocracoke Inlet meets the sound).