

Plover: The birds born in Oregon last year have violet bands

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hide behind driftwood to find shelter from the wind, according to park officials.

To nest successfully, the snowy plovers need the right conditions and to not be distributed by beachgoers.

During their nesting season between March 15 and July 15, park officials restrict access to the half-mile monitoring area. No beachgoers can walk, bicycle, drive or take their dogs on the site, which is located only in the dry sand above the tide line.

“We are not really out here to write a bunch of tickets,” Murphy said. “We are doing more of an interpretive approach.”

Murphy is one of many officials who keep tabs on the management area near Clatsop Spit. Others include Blackstone, NOAA fishers officers and Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office deputies.

The officials monitor the site for disturbances like tire tracks or foot steps. In addition, they look for the snowy plovers, nests and tracks.

Snowy plovers in Oregon have small bands around their legs, placed by wildlife biologist for tracking purposes. The bands are color-coordinated by location and age of the birds.

Snowy plovers born in Oregon last year have violet bands.

“There are probably eyeballs on this site four or five times per week,” Murphy said.

If a nest is found, the restrictions on the monitoring site would be pushed to Sept. 15, the latest snowy plovers usually breed. The restrictions would also be increased to not allow any activity in the surrounding area, including no kite-flying since kites imitate predatory birds.



Photo by Michael “Mike” L. Baird
Western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) birds on Morro Strand State Beach, in Morro Bay, Calif., 2010.



Submitted
Western snowy plover eggs.

Why the decline?

Multiple factors have led to snowy plovers becoming endangered. An increase in European beach grass, urban development and human disturbance have all played a role in the declining population.

Mike Stein, North Coast district manager for Fort Stevens State Park, said the state park has never offered protection to this degree for an endangered species, especially in a place like Clatsop Spit, which has high levels of activity.

Actively managing the select locations rather than the

entire beach area has created a fair balance between conservation and recreation at the park, Stein said.

“It’s been a winning formula, to date,” he said.

Outside of the half-mile management area, the rest of the park is business as usual. For the snowy plover conservation to be successful, Murphy said, it will take community support.

“Be aware of these areas and what we are trying to accomplish and be a good steward for it,” Murphy said. “The rest of the beach is just as open as it always was.”



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian
North Coast Beach Ranger Ken Murphy walks by animal tracks in the shorebird conservation area at Fort Stevens State Park. Part of the job includes monitoring animal tracks in the conservation area to make sure the area is not being disturbed by people or predatory animals.



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian
North Coast Beach Ranger Ken Murphy makes an example of what a snowy plover nest would look like in the sand. A nest looks like a shallow divot in the sand with approximately three sand-colored eggs in the center.

Cormorants: Advocates of Corps’ plan say the birds could devastate fish runs

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“I don’t know exactly where this is going to take us,” said Amy Echols, assistant chief with the Corps’ public affairs office in Portland, about the complaint.

Bob Sallinger, the society’s conservation director, is also concerned about the timing of the culling. Peak nesting season is approaching on the island — Oregon State University researchers on the island say the first eggs are usually laid between mid-April and early May — and the Corps estimates that an additional 3,489 nestlings and eggs might die if their parents are shot and they are orphaned. A Corps spokesperson said contractors are on the island now, erecting fencing that will separate out nesting areas, but that it will be several more weeks before they begin killing the birds.

Salmon eaters

East Sand Island, close to the mouth of the Columbia River near Chinook, Wash., is a seasonal home to several bird species: cormorants, pelicans and Caspian terns. While a management plan has long been in place to deal with the fluctuating tern population, the Corps only this year established a management plan for the double-crested cormorants. That colony, along with the tern colony, the Corps says, consume millions of juvenile salmonids every year.

To satisfy requirements by National Marine Fisheries Service to protect these fish runs already impacted by dams, the Corps plans to ultimately kill around 16,000 double-crested cormorants



EO Media Group file
A double-crested cormorant rests atop of nest of eggs in the colony on East Sand Island.

by 2018, a move supported by other groups, including commercial and recreational fishing advocates and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. Each year, the Corps will need to reapply for a depredation permit since the birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

“We are deeply disappointed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for issuing these permits,” Sallinger said in a statement. “The public looks to Fish and Wildlife Service to protect wild birds, not to permit wanton slaughter.”

Opponents of the Corps’ management plan have said East Sand Island is one of the few places on the West Coast where the double-crested cormorants are thriving. Meanwhile, the Oregon Department of Fish

and Wildlife went forward with plans to haze cormorants this month, interrupting their feeding patterns by driving small boats at the birds and firing at them with small pyrotechnics on the Tillamook and Alsea bays and at the mouths of the Columbia, Nehalem, Nestucca and Coquille rivers through the end of May.

Advocates of the Corps’ management plan on East Sand Island have argued that the birds are consuming too many young salmon and, if left unchecked, could devastate fish runs, especially when combined with other pressures in the environment: the large Caspian tern colony and the record number of fish-chomping sea lions and seals visiting the lower Columbia River this year.

All three cormorant spe-

cies — the targeted double-crested cormorants and Brandt’s cormorants actually nest on the island while the pelagic cormorants fly by from time to time — are included in the depredation permit, in part because all three can easily be mistaken for each other when they are flying out over the water.

Researchers and bird experts who have worked on the island and killed birds for research purposes in the past say they’ve even confused the birds before. Though contractors will not be targeting Brandt’s and pelagic cormorants, it is likely some could get caught in the crosshairs. That “incidental take” must be accounted for in the agency’s application for a depredation permit, spokespeople from the Corps said earlier this year.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard District 13
Vice Adm. Charles W. Ray, commander of Coast Guard Pacific Area, stands with Capt. Charles G. Alcock (left), former commanding officer of Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast, and Cmdr. John R. Bitterman, commanding officer of Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast, during a change-of-command ceremony at Seattle’s Museum of History and Industry, after Bitterman assumed command from Alcock, July 15, 2014.

Bitterman: Cmdr. John Pruitt has taken temporary command of the Steadfast

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Cmdr. John Pruitt from the Coast Guard Motion Picture & Television Office in Los Angeles has taken temporary command of the Steadfast.

The 210-foot Steadfast patrols from the Pacific Northwest to South America. The cutter completed its last deployment in late February.

Bitterman, according to his Coast Guard biography, is originally from Glenwood Springs, Colo. He enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1989 and graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn.

He has previously served on the cutters Clover in Eureka, Calif.; Rush in Honolulu; Alert in Asto-

ria; Edisto in San Diego; and Steadfast.

Bitterman had been the commanding officer of the Edisto. He also served with the Law Enforcement Team 8-G in Galveston, Texas, and in the Coast Guard’s headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Before taking control of the Steadfast, he was the Coast Guard’s Police Attaché in Bogota, Colombia.

“Returning to a ship that I previously served on is an outstanding opportunity,” Bitterman said last year in an email to The Daily Astorian after taking command of the Steadfast.

“I am thrilled to be a part of the Steadfast’s illustrious history, and I look forward to many adventures with our exceptional crew.”

Buckmaster: Jon Englund was the last person to represent the area on the commission

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Committee on Rules, according to an email from Molly Woon, communications director for the Senate Majority Office.

Brown also reappointed two current commission members — Holly Akenson of Enterprise, and Michael Finley of Medford — and she appointed Jason Atkinson of Jacksonville

to replace Bobby Levy, whose term on the commission ended Jan. 1. Atkinson is a fly-fisherman, former state senator and Republican candidate for governor.

The Kitzhaber administration had already interviewed Buckmaster for the position, Buckmaster said in an interview with the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group last fall. Buckmaster previously owned

a salmon feed company and served on the board of Salmon for All, a group that represents commercial fishermen, processors and other businesses on the Lower Columbia River.

The 1st Congressional District seat on the commission sat empty since 2012 and during that time, the commission that normally has seven members has operated with only six. During the vacancy, the com-

mission worked to implement Kitzhaber’s plan to ban gillnets on the main stem of the Columbia River and move commercial use of the nets into side channels.

Kitzhaber had talked about subjecting his gillnet plan to “adaptive management,” which to Buckmaster means offering a suite of options and actions that could be taken to further the gillnet plan to offer an econom-

ic win-win for commercial and sport fishing.

“That has not occurred yet. We have not seen any suite of options,” Buckmaster said. “And some of those would certainly be favored by the sportsfishing interest. We have to look at what will actually be produced.”

The last person to represent the area on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Commission was Jon Englund of Englund Marine & Industrial Supply in Astoria, who was appointed by former Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

“I would model myself after the work and balance John Englund showed during his tenure on the commission,” Buckmaster said. “He showed me that it could be done well.”

Kyle Spurr of The Daily Astorian assisted with this article.