



Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Map of snowy plover management areas in the 2010 habitat conservation plan.

Plovers: If there is no nesting behavior by July 15, the department will lift restrictions

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“Western snowy plovers were at Gearhart in March of last year, and we watched them for any signs of nesting activity,” she said. “Those two birds did not choose to nest at Gearhart, and had left the site by April.”

Limited access

In 2013, the Gearhart City Council agreed to assist the state in developing a shorebird conservation area meant to help the recovery of the species and enhance the habitat for other shorebirds. By limiting seasonal access, officials hoped the western snowy plover would return to traditional nesting sites. But the protections haven't yielded results, as a nesting site hasn't been seen on the Necanicum Spit since 2002.

The restricted area makes up about 25 percent of the 77-acre beach area between Gearhart and the Necanicum Spit.

While Nehalem Bay State Park saw the hatching of a western snowy plover chick last May for the first time in 30 years, most nesting sites on the North Coast, including Gearhart, haven't seen signs of nesting for a “very long time,” according to Laurel Hillmann, an ocean shores specialist with the Parks and Recreation Department.

As a result, in February, Hillmann told the City Council the area will no longer be kept as an active bird management site and seasonal restrictions will be lifted. Less-trafficked areas on the central and southern coast are more inviting and will be the focus of future nesting protections, Hillmann said, and Gearhart's seasonally posted signs advising of snowy plover habitat would no longer be posted.

Watching for nests

The Parks and Recreation Department will begin monitoring Gearhart later this month for the contin-

ued presence of plovers and any signs of nesting behavior. Seasonal restrictions go into place on Thursday, prohibiting unleashed dogs, vehicles and bicycles in unoccupied plover areas.

If there is no nesting behavior by July 15, the department will lift restrictions.

Restrictions would also be lifted if the Parks and Recreation Department, state Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conclude that it is in the best interest for species recovery to manage a different site, Blackstone said.

Agencies will still protect individual plover nests that are discovered, she added.

For now, Blackstone, Green and wildlife officials will keep their eyes on the sand.

“A plover could be nesting and nobody would ever see it,” Green said. “They are able to bury their eggs pretty well. It's possible you could have plover nesting and not even know it.”



John Green

A western snowy plover observed in Gearhart in December.

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Photos by Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Kate Gohr, left, principal at John Jacob Astor Elementary School, said only one of her building's two 1989 boilers work, while the other is barely running.

Schools: School Board will likely decide in May how to approach funding

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decreased from the original \$2.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value to \$1.83 as of this year because of increased property values and bond refinancing. The expense comes off the tax rolls in two years.

Constructed in 1968, Astoria Middle School was touched least by the 2000 bond measure, aside from renovations to the track. It was built on a filled-in ravine. Although structurally sound, the campus has experienced numerous cracks in the floor and walls from settling.

“The floor, the concrete slab, isn't connected to the foundation,” said Tom Bates, an architect advising the school district. “A lot of these cracks are related to the fact that there's just been a lot of movement over years, because things aren't knitted together the way we would do it in today's construction versus back in '68.”

Some of the classrooms at the middle school are under-sized and have no windows or natural light, along with poor ventilation and antiquated infrastructure, Principal Linda Berger said.

The long-range facilities plan included a \$31 million partial reconstruction and remodel of the middle school, creating three modernized small learning communities each able to accommodate up to 150 students.

Astoria High School, constructed in 1957, includes four separate buildings connected by covered walkways. The 2000 bond measure added a science center, student commons and auxiliary gym.

When the district recently locked front doors and added video intercom and buzz-in systems, the high school was not included because the dispersed campus includes more than 70 entry points.

“These doors are locked throughout the school day, but still ... we do not have the ability to have a universal system of security,” said Lynn



Lynn Jackson, principal of Astoria High School, said the campus needs modernization and increased security.

Jackson, the school's principal. “One of the things we're exploring are ways in which we can make these four buildings one and connected so that once our students arrive at 8 o'clock in the morning, they can navigate anywhere within the building, the campus, without having to leave.”

The school district is also hoping to modernize its shop spaces to accommodate new career-technical education programs, enlarge and modernize its science labs, add performing arts rehearsal spaces and remodel the auditorium, while fixing foundational issues in the locker rooms. The district also hopes to improve the tracks at the middle and high schools.

The long-range facility plan included \$17 million worth of improvements needed at the high school.

John Jacob Astor Elementary School, the district's oldest, was built in the 1920s, with an auxiliary gym added in 1935 and a newer main gym in the 1950s. The kindergarten-through-second grade school was remodeled and seismically upgraded through the 2000 bond measure.

Unique security issues

Astoria faces unique security issues as the school where the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie “Kindergarten Cop” was filmed. People regularly approach the school for tours, said Principal Kate Gohr. The house made famous in “The Goonies” movie is in the same Uppertown neighborhood.

“For ‘The Goonies’ (30th) anniversary, I had to hire a guard for my front door,” she said.

The main office is down the hall from the main entrance, an uncommon arrangement in modern schools. The district is looking at relocating it into part of the library nearer to the front door.

The district hopes to renovate the old gym into a multipurpose room and cafeteria, remodel several kindergarten classrooms, add more bathrooms and improve access for people with disabilities. The long-range plan included \$5.8 million in improvements at the school.

“This is the one building where we're worried about capacity,” Hoppes said.

The school district's population has declined slightly in recent years, but Hoppes said it added about 75 students this year, largely in kindergarten. The projects at Astor would increase the school's capacity by about 90 students.

The district's long-range plan has also identified about \$750,000 in improvements needed at Capt. Robert Gray School, used as the district's main office, an alternative high school campus and for Head Start and district-run preschool programs. Another \$250,000 was identified at Lewis and Clark, the district's newest school.

The Astoria School Board will likely decide in May how to approach funding the improvements.

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