



Proposed Critical Habitat for Wintering Piping Plovers on Marco Island, Florida

An Endangered Species

Piping plovers are 2 oz., 7 inch-long shorebirds. In the United States, they nest in the Great Lakes region, the Great Plains, and the northern Atlantic coast and winter in coastal areas from North Carolina to Texas. Piping plovers migrate from their breeding grounds to their southeastern wintering grounds in late summer, where they use beaches or mud, sand and algal flats for feeding and roosting. Piping plovers have been recorded regularly on Marco Island beaches.

In 1985, the piping plover was listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Great Lakes population is in the greatest danger of extinction, with only 32 breeding pairs in existence today. Much of the plover's decline can be attributed to loss of habitat. While habitat loss in the northern nesting areas has the most direct effect on the birds, the birds also must have enough wintering areas to survive and recover.

Since listing the plover, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) has reviewed all projects authorized, funded or carried out by Federal agencies to ensure that these projects do not jeopardize the continued existence of the plover. This includes projects on Marco Island, such as Tigertail and Hideaway Beach. No project requiring a Federal permit or Federal funding in Florida has been denied because of the piping plover.

Critical habitat

Critical habitat is a provision in the ESA that requires the Service to designate areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species. Critical habitat does not establish a preserve or refuge, and applies only to situations where Federal funding or a Federal permit is involved. When an activity does not have a Federal connection, in cases such as beach access to state, local, or private land, then critical habitat does not apply.

Plover Critical Habitat Does Not Threaten Marco Island

Marco Island citizens will not see changes in beach management as a result of the designation of critical habitat.

No Restrictions To Beach Access:

The Service has no authority to restrict access to beaches in private or State ownership. Furthermore, beach recreational activities of Marco Island such as shell collecting, walking, and bird watching, pose little to no threat to the piping plover.

No Changes In Review and Consultations on Beach Nourishment Projects:

The Service already reviews beach nourishment and other Federal projects to ensure that they do not jeopardize the continued existence of the plover. Our recommendations about these projects will be the same with or without a critical habitat designation. A critical habitat review is done simultaneously with the current review process, so the designation will not create project delays.



USFWS



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