

USACE Natural Resource Management

Migratory Birds



Piping Plover

FAST FACTS

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: In 1986 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Great Lakes watershed distinct population segment (DPS) as an endangered species. That same year the Northern Great Plains and Atlantic Coast populations were listed as threatened.

USFWS notes the primary threats impacting this species are the degradation and destruction of habitat, shoreline erosion, predation, and human disturbance. Human presence may inhibit courtship, incubation, and brooding. Nests may also be trampled due to human presence. Reservoir water management is a major concern; water impounded in the spring can result in flooded nests and reduced brood rearing habitat.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Multiple cooperative research groups have been established via partnerships between the Canadian Wildlife Service, State and Federal Agencies, as well as university and private research centers. These research groups have conducted studies to determine where plovers breed and winter, population estimates, and monitor long-term changes in populations.

Habitat protection efforts are carried out each year including limiting human access to nesting areas, nest protection and monitoring, and carefully managing water flow.

HABITAT NEEDS: Breeding habitat can be described as wide, sandy beaches with very little vegetation. Plovers are also known to nest on gravel beaches.

- Piping Plovers winter along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast. During this time, plovers occupy beaches, mudflats, and sandflats as well as the barrier island beaches and spoil beaches of the Gulf Intercostal Waterway.
- In migration, plovers can be found on beaches and alkali flats. Reservoir shoreline is one of the most common habitats in the interior U.S., but plovers also visit natural lakes, industrial ponds, rivers, and marsh wetlands.

Size: Piping plovers grow to be 6.7-7.1 inches in length and weigh between 1.5-2.2 oz .
(All About Birds, Cornell)

Color: During the breeding season these birds have orange bills with black tips. Their legs are orange while their plumage is pale brown above and light underneath. Males have a black band that circles the body at the breast and may be complete or incomplete. Females have a paler head band than males, which is incomplete. During winter, bills are black and both sexes lack the head and breast bands. *(USFWS)*

*Photos by Laura Nelson,
Albuquerque District*

*Natural Resource
Management (NRM)*

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USACE ROLE: USACE has jurisdictional authority over much of the species' range. The USFWS and other partners work with USACE to ensure our actions throughout the range of the species continue to provide habitat for nesting Piping Plovers. Our work with state and private partners to protect nesting areas and migration habitats is coupled with continued public education and outreach on the species' needs and native habitat needs.

Photo: Shoreline Habitat Improvement at John Martin Reservoir. Staff mow and clear shoreline vegetation to provide suitable habitat conditions. Outside of habitat season, the area is open for public use.



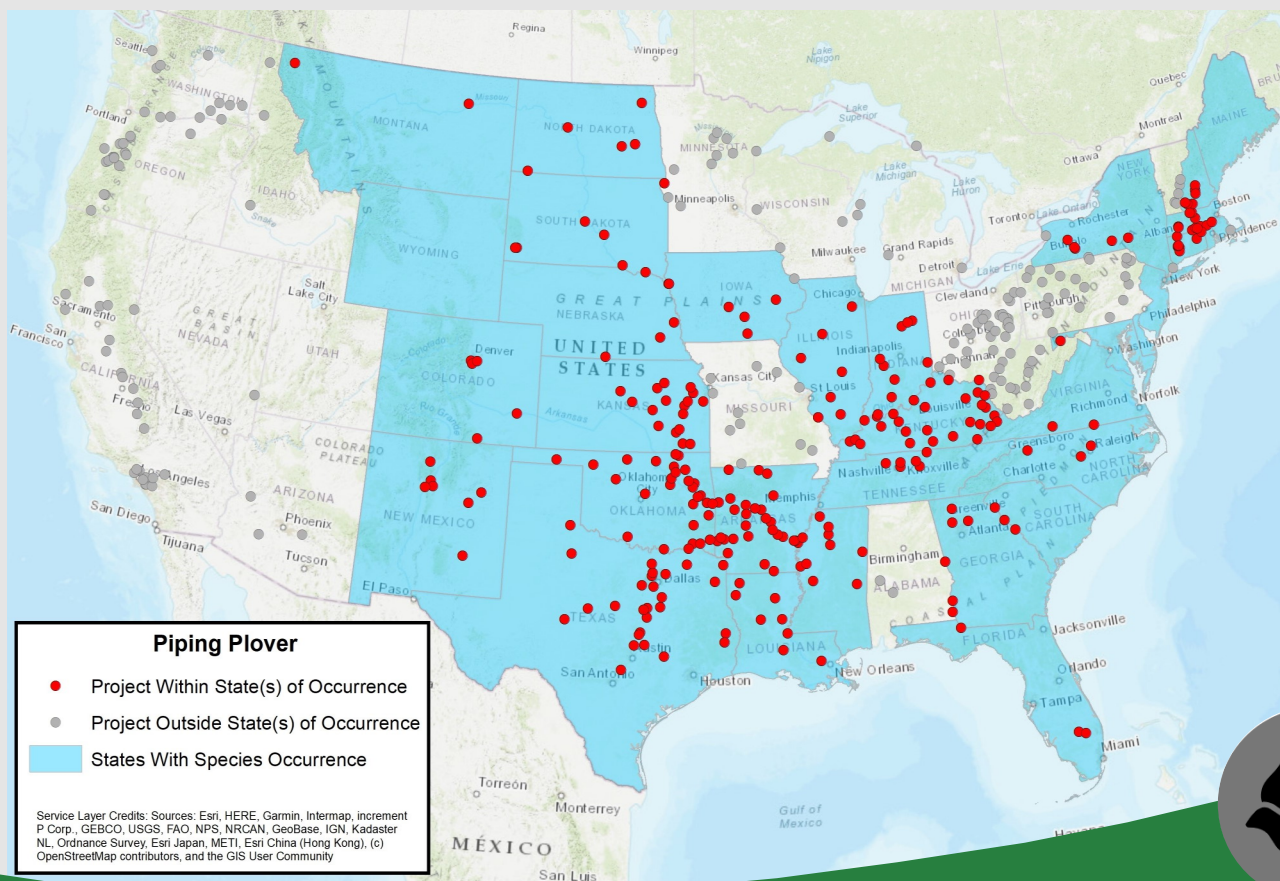
WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

1 Missouri River Recover Program: In 2006 the USACE initiated the Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP) in order to comply with the USFWS Biological Opinion while continuing congressionally authorized use of the river.

Under this program, actions are taken to protect Piping Plover nests via predator management, installing cages around nests, moving nests and/or chicks from locations that may be inundated due to rising water levels, and posting restriction signs to minimize human disturbance at nesting sites.

2 Shoreline Habitat Improvement at John Martin Reservoir, Albuquerque District: Located in southeastern Colorado, John Martin Reservoir has a small nesting population of Piping Plovers and Interior Least Terns. With John Martin and small nearby lakes being the only places in Colorado where these birds are found, the monitoring and protection of the species is critical to supporting their status in Colorado. However, John Martin Reservoir is also a prime location for recreational use. Easy public access to nesting sites has caused human disturbance during nesting season and posed a serious risk to plover and tern populations.

Efforts were increased by USACE to reduce the negative impacts of recreational activities on breeding habitat during nesting season. More drastic measures were taken as trenches were dug out, buoys were placed along nesting islands, and informational and restricted access signs were posted to reduce human disturbance. Additionally, as plovers prefer to nest in sandy beaches, John Martin Reservoir staff have mowed and cleared vegetation during spring seasons to prepare for the species arrival.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE Fellowship, Institute for Water Resources

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