



WEDNESDAY  
August 17, 2005

## Snowy plover costs projected to be huge

By JEFF BARNARD  
Associated Press Writer

GRANTS PASS - Setting aside 17,000 acres of West Coast beaches as critical habitat for the western snowy plover, a threatened species, will cost coastal economies between \$273 million and \$645 million over the next 20 years, primarily from lost recreation, according to a draft study released Tuesday by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Economic impacts could be so great to small businesses in some beach communities from Monterey, Calif., south to San Diego that Fish and Wildlife said it is considering excluding them from the critical habitat designation.

Two beaches on Monterey Bay and one each at Pismo Beach, Morro Bay and Coronado's Silver Strand account for three-quarters of the effected areas, according to the study.

The final critical habitat designation, taking into account the economic analysis, is due Sept. 20.

The study was done by Industrial Economics Inc. of Cambridge, Mass.

A new critical habitat proposal was forced last year after Coos County commissioners sued, arguing that the 1999 critical habitat designation failed to include an economic impacts analysis, as required by the Endangered Species Act.

The latest critical habitat proposal calls for

35 units in Washington, Oregon and California covering 17,299 acres. That is 11 percent less area than the 28 units covering 19,474 acres designated in 1999. Federal land comprises 26 percent of the proposed area, state or other public land 51 percent, and private land 23 percent. Most of the units are in California.

An estimated 2,600 snowy plovers are distributed along the coast in California, Oregon and Washington, with the highest numbers in California and fewest in Washington. The birds forage for food in the surf and lay camouflaged eggs in depressions in bare sand.

They are down to 28 nesting sites, due primarily to European beach grass being planted to stabilize shifting dunes.

Gains in populations have been made recently by killing foxes and ravens that prey on the nests and by clearing beach grass.

During the spring and summer nesting season, restrictions have been imposed on driving, running dogs and walking on beaches near nesting areas, prompting loud complaints from some beach users.

The city of Morro Bay, Calif., and the Surf Ocean Beach Commission of Lompoc, Calif., have called for taking the plover off the threatened species list, arguing that coastal populations are the same as healthy inland populations.

Amedee Brickey, endangered species program manager for Fish and Wildlife in Arcata, Calif., said plover populations are

generally improving, thanks to killing predators and putting wire cages around nests. However, 35 adult birds died recently, apparently from some disease, in Southern California.

Coos County Commissioner John Griffith, whose lawsuit forced the economic analysis, argued that it vastly underestimates the economic impacts of closing beaches.

Griffith said a report from state and federal agencies estimating economic losses from closing beaches on the North Spit of Coos Bay during the 1999 cleanup of the wreck of the New Carissa at \$430,000 for just eight months.

Yet the plover report projected impacts for the next 20 years at \$527,000 total.

Kieran Suckling, policy director for the Center for Biological Diversity, called the study "economic voodoo," because it calculates the whole cost of conserving the plover, rather than just preserving habitat, and fails to take into account any economic benefits from protecting beaches from development.

"It's really disheartening to see the Bush administration turn economic science into political science and use it as a club to beat endangered species," Suckling said.