



There are state and federal shorebird management plans currently being developed in Massachusetts. Both propose to protect and advance recovery of vulnerable piping plovers and tern species, and both include provisions for lethal control of predators and increased recreational access to beaches where plovers nest and raise young.

But there are some differences:

*MASSACHUSETTS HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FOR PIPING PLOVER (HCP)*

A plan that will address shorebird management on **all Massachusetts beachfronts**—from Salisbury on the North Shore to Westport on the South Coast and including the Cape and Islands—is being prepared by the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. **The approved plan will be for 25 years.**

The proposal (in the Public Comment period through February 19) would seek to bolster shorebird protection while increasing beach access, typically for off-road vehicles (ORVs). The goal, especially as Mass Audubon views it, is to advance recovery of piping plovers. One of several objectives is to provide management flexibility for beach managers—the long-term benefit to plover recovery is for a more accepting and supportive public.

The state HCP includes a provision that would allow ORVs to be escorted in specific circumstances past broods of unfledged chicks. There will be also be formally trained paid staff providing additional monitoring around the vehicle corridor.

Communities would apply to obtain a permit to conduct flexible management as prescribed in the HCP, and would pay into a mitigation fund as a hedge against any broods harmed as a result of the plan's recreational access allowances.

Municipalities, nonprofit groups, state agencies, and private landowners that have piping plover conservation responsibilities could apply to be included in the HCP program. **Wildlife agency officials would like to have the plan in place for the 2016 season.**

- *Town of Orleans HCP*

Observers may view this plan for the Cape Cod town in which most of popular Nauset Beach is located as a pilot program for what the statewide plan could resemble. The town had pursued an HCP on its own, and it debuted in 2015. The Orleans HCP included escorted ORV access; the plan was in place for 13 days when piping plover broods were fledging on Nauset Beach and 155 vehicles passed through the access road.

The town paid \$10,000 into the mitigation fund for exposure of two broods. **The Orleans plan is for three years, although the community may apply to join the 25-year state HCP.**

#### *CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE (CACO)*

The Cape Cod National Seashore (CACO) Comprehensive Shorebird Management Plan will be **an update of its existing plan, which dates to 1994**. The CACO plan has been **drafted by the National Park Service**, which manages the Seashore. This plan **covers only the 44,000-acre Seashore**, which stretches from Chatham to Provincetown and includes 40 miles of beach.

The CACO plan also seeks to protect both vulnerable piping plovers and terns in multiple ways, including by lethal management of animal predators. Mass Audubon opposes provisions in the CACO plan to increase ORV access because this runs counter to the plan's primary goal to improve nesting success of vulnerable shorebirds.

Unlike the state and Orleans HCP plans, the Seashore program **does not allow escorted vehicles through areas with unfledged plover chicks or include a mitigation process.**

Given the substantial number of responses received during the Public Comment period (more than 2200), National Seashore Supt. George Price has stated the CACO Shorebird Plan **will not be ready for implementation this season.**

The plan, when ultimately approved, **will remain in place for an unspecified number of years until officials determine another update is appropriate.**