



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fire Island  
National Seashore

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## Fire Island National Seashore News Release

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### **Piping Plovers Return to Fire Island; National Park Service Implements Annual Protection Procedures**

*Patchogue, New York*—Piping plovers arrived on Fire Island by mid- March, and mating and nesting activity has begun. The first eggs of the season were observed on April 30, 2008 near Old Inlet. Over the past few years, hatch and fledge rates have decreased, despite an increasing number of breeding pairs. Each year Fire Island National Seashore installs symbolic fencing to protect suitable plover habitat. As nests are established, exclosures will be constructed to protect both the nests and the eggs. During the plover nesting season, the National Park Service closes portions of its beaches to pets and kites, and further restricts vehicle access to the beach. From mid- March through Labor Day, pets and kites are not permitted at the following Fire Island National Seashore locations:

- On the ocean beach from the east boundary of Robert Moses State Park to the Village of Kismet.
- On the ocean beach between Oakleyville and Cherry Grove in the Sailors Haven area (which is part of the Sunken Forest Preserve).
- From the western boundary of Smith Point County Park west to Old Long Cove, east of Watch Hill.

Additional stretches of beach may also be closed to pets, kites and vehicles as birds nest in other areas. In 2007, Barrett Beach and the western portion of Watch Hill beach were also off- limits for pets for about six weeks. Pets and kites are not permitted at any time on lifeguarded beaches.

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The park begins preparing for the return of the piping plover in late March. Some restrictions on beach driving are implemented by March 15, with significant changes related to driving east of Watch Hill and west of Cherry Grove. By April 1, symbolic fencing has been installed on portions of the beach that produced successful nests last year or that met the criteria for desirable plover breeding habitat.

As nests are established, park staff and volunteers construct protective exclosures to keep predators away from the eggs. Once nest- building and egg- laying begins, the National Park Service may restrict and close additional areas to driving, pets, except *bona fide* service dogs, and kite- flying.

Piping plover mating usually occurs from late March through early June. Plovers generally lay one egg every other day until they reach a complete clutch of four eggs. The eggs are incubated for about 27 days. Once hatched, chicks fledge, or fly from the nest, usually within 25- 35 days. Most nesting activity has ceased by mid- August and the birds fly south for the winter.

Until the chicks are able to fly, residents and visitors to Fire Island National Seashore are asked to respect the closed areas set up to protect these birds. Dogs and people running through enclosed areas may crush eggs and chicks. Flying kites and flags may resemble a hovering hawk and frighten chicks and adults, forcing them to abandon their nests. By leaving your dogs and kites at home when you make your trek to the beach, you help enhance the protection of rare, threatened, or endangered bird species. Beach closures also protect endangered plants within the symbolic fencing.

Fire Island National Seashore has been monitoring and protecting its five federally listed threatened and endangered species since 1986. The most productive season recorded was in 2005, when park biologists recorded 17 breeding pairs of piping plovers (the same number as the year before) which fledged 40 plover chicks (a productivity of 2.4 chicks/nest). Although the 2007 season had an even greater number of breeding pairs (25 pairs of birds with 35 nesting attempts), only 18 chicks fledged. The 2007 productivity rate was 0.72 chicks/nest, down from 1.5 chicks/nest in 2006, and lower than this rate had been since 1997.

Three portions of the Fire Island shoreline were renourished in the winter of 2003- 04, adding more than a million cubic yards of sand to beaches in front of some communities and Smith Point County Park. The Fire Island communities that paid for the dredging were required to protect a percentage of the reclaimed beach for endangered species habitat with symbolic fencing on those beaches for up to five years. A bonus: symbolic fencing also helps protect young sprouting beach grass, which stabilizes the sand dune.

In 2007, nesting piping plovers were located at five different dune crossings, the first time this has been recorded in Fire Island National Seashore. The extra nesting sites caused a rerouting of essential service traffic through several Fire Island communities and the expansion of restrictions on dogs and kites. Respect and tolerance for these requirements has been greatly appreciated. Fire Island National Seashore's Acting Superintendent Sean McGuinness stated, "We would like to see greater productivity rates this year on Fire Island. There has been steady progress in the return of the piping plover on Long Island, and we are hopeful that this will be a successful year. Everyone's cooperation is appreciated."



Periodic overwashes—a natural barrier island process—provide ideal nesting habitat for plovers and terns. Symbolic fencing (string between poles, marked with orange flagging) is installed as plovers begin to return to suitable nesting areas. After eggs are laid, staff and volunteers construct a protective enclosure around each nest. Hat covers nest, above, to protect eggs while work is quickly completed.

NPS Photo

For further information about this [project](#) or about Fire Island National Seashore, call 631- 687- 4750, or visit the park web site at [www.nps.gov/fiis](http://www.nps.gov/fiis). # # #

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