Protecting the Snowy Plover

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

A Bird in Danger

Western Snowy Plover resting on Ocean Beach.

In March 1993, the Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) was listed as a threatened species, protected under the Endangered Species Act. Up to 100 of the estimated 2,300 birds remaining on the Pacific Coast can be found in Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

The Snowy Plover is a small shorebird that stands about 6 inches high, with dark markings across the forehead, behind the eyes, and a partial breast band. Snowy Plovers use sandy beaches, mudflats and salt ponds in San Francisco Bay and along the outer coast for breeding, resting and foraging. The Western Snowy Plover and its beach habitat are threatened by urban development, the spread of European dune grass, increased predation, intense recreational use, and human-caused disturbance.

Western Snowy Plovers at GGNRA

Although Western Snowy Plovers do not nest at GGNRA, they do spend up to ten months of the year on portions of Ocean Beach and Crissy Field. During their time here (approximately July until May), Snowy Plovers spend their days resting in shallow depressions in the sand (such as footprints), where they are camouflaged and out of the wind. They also build up their fat reserves for breeding by eating small invertebrates in debris left by the tides. In spring they move up and down the coast and to inland salt flats to nest.

The National Park Service, established in part to protect America's vanishing wildlife, faces an important challenge in protecting the Western Snowy Plover.

YOU play an important role in the recovery of the Western Snowy Plover!

A Snowy Plover's natural response is to run or fly from danger. Continuous or repeated disturbance uses up their stored energy reserves and may jeopardize future breeding success.

To protect the Western Snowy Plover, GGNRA has created two seasonal (July until May) protection areas—see maps on reverse**:**

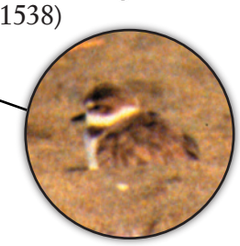
- Ocean Beach Snowy Plover Protection Area (Stairwell #21, just south of the Beach Chalet, to Sloat Blvd.—including all tidelands.)
- Crissy Field Wildlife Protection Area (west end of Crissy Field Beach)

The following are prohibited in these protection areas:

- Dogs off leash (36 CFR 1.5(a)(2))
- Disturbing wildlife (36 CFR 2.2)
- Disturbing threatened species (16 USC 1538)

When you are in the Snowy Plover protection areas, you should:

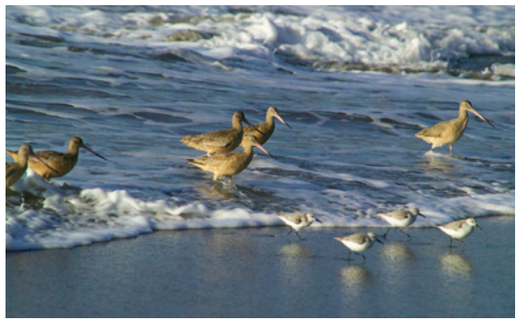
- Keep your dog on leash. Snowy Plovers perceive dogs as predators; dogs often chase them and other shorebirds.
- Walk, jog, or ride your horse on the wet sand away from the upper parts of the beach where Snowy Plovers are most likely to be found.
- Fly your kites, play frisbee and throw balls in the areas close to the water, away from where Snowy Plovers rest.
- Dispose of garbage properly to avoid attracting predators.
- Leave kelp and driftwood on the beach—these provide resting and feeding areas for the Snowy Plover.
- Call Park Dispatch at (415) 561-5505 if you notice any disturbance or threat to the Western Snowy Plover.



Well hidden within the beach sand, these tiny birds blend into their environment. Please use the beach close to the water.

The Community of Shorebirds

Snowy Plovers are often seen with other wintering and migratory shorebirds such as Marbled Godwits, Willets, Heerman's Gulls, Caspian Terns, and Sanderlings, many of whom travel hundreds of miles during migration. These birds are also susceptible to the effects of constant disturbance. Because half of the shorebirds in North America are in decline, effective protection strategies must consider all shorebirds and not just a single species.



Top: Western Snowy Plover feeding at the high tide line. Bottom: Shorebirds feeding at the water's edge.

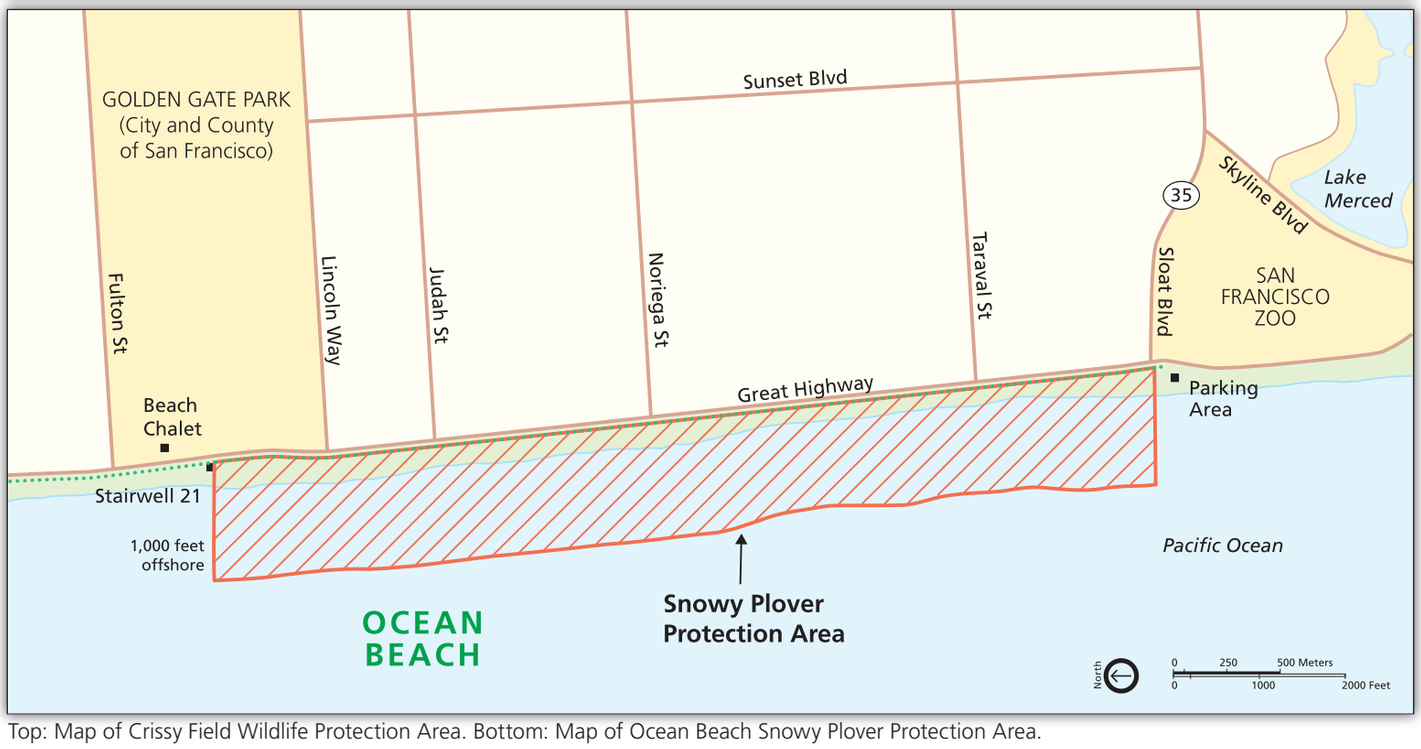
YOUR actions make a difference!

Please help protect the Western Snowy Plover and other shorebirds from human-caused disturbance.

To volunteer to monitor the Western Snowy Plover or improve habitats in the park call (415) 561-4755.

Together we can help the Western Snowy Plover survive and thrive.

Western Snowy Plover Protection Areas



Top: Map of Crissy Field Wildlife Protection Area. Bottom: Map of Ocean Beach Snowy Plover Protection Area.

(rev. 10/06)