

November 3, 2005

Santa Monica, California

INFORMATION ITEM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: City staff

SUBJECT: Response to Presence of Endangered Western Snowy Plovers on Santa Monica Beach

Background

In 2004, City staff was informed that Western Snowy Plovers, a bird species listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, were present on a limited portion of Santa Monica beach. This Information Item summarizes activities undertaken by the City in response to the presence of the Western Snowy Plovers during this year's winter season.

Discussion

The Endangered Species Act is a federal regulation that provides protection to plant and animal species whose populations have dwindled to near-extinction. One such species, the Western Snowy Plover, has recently been found to winter on a small portion of Santa Monica beach (an area north of Montana Boulevard approximately 200 yards by 40 yards near the water's edge). The birds typically arrive in Santa Monica in October/November and return to nest in Oregon in April/May. Santa Monica's Western Snowy Plover population averages approximately 50 birds, and is believed to be increasing annually.

The presence of the threatened species requires that the City and other agencies responsible for activities on the beach take precautionary actions in the area of the bird habitat. Although the Plovers do not nest on Santa Monica's beaches, biologists have concluded that their reproductive success when they return to Oregon is predicated on a successful winter forage season in Santa Monica.

To this end, the City is part of an interagency collaboration to ensure that the birds and their winter habitat are left relatively undisturbed while continuing to allow residents and visitors to enjoy the beach. This effort includes the City's Environmental Programs, Open Space Management and Solid Waste Management divisions, the Police Department, and departments within the City and County of Los Angeles. The City's Snowy Plover habitat protection practices were developed and implemented with concurrence from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the California State Parks and Fish and Game departments, and the Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society.

Elements of habitat protection include a non-exclusionary snow fence placed around the bird habitat, educational signage, vehicle exclusion (except in an emergency), informational brochures mailed to nearby residents, articles in local newspapers such as Seascapes and the Santa Monica Daily Press, and coverage on CityTV. The habitat area is open to beach visitors, although adjacent educational signage reminds visitors that they are recreating close to a protected

bird population. These safeguards are implemented seasonally and once the Plovers have left the area, the beach is returned to its normal use.

Staff anticipates annual implementation of this initiative and will remain in contact with appropriate regulatory agencies so long as the migratory pattern continues. In the event that significant changes occur in the efforts, staff will inform City Council.

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