



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fire Island  
National Seashore

120 Laurel Street  
Patchogue, NY 11772

631 289-4810 phone  
631 289-4898 fax

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## Fire Island National Seashore News Release

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**Contact(s):** Michael Bilecki, Chief of Resources Management

**Phone number:** 631- 687- 4760

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

*Patchogue, NY*—The first piping plover of the season is usually observed on Fire Island by mid-March. Nesting and mating begins soon after the birds arrive, and the first egg of the season can be expected by late April. In hopes of continuing last year's success rate with its threatened and endangered species program, Fire Island National Seashore will begin installation of fencing to protect suitable plover habitat around the beginning of April. 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 March 16 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.

Pets are not permitted at any time on lifeguarded beaches at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven.

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The park begins preparing for the return of the piping plover in late March. 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 enclosures 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 animals), 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 seasons 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 (3 more chicks than were fledged in 2004). In 2006, the number of nests and the number chicks fledged were reduced (of 21 breeding pairs, there were only 15 successful nests which fledged 32 chicks), but the average productivity (1.5 chicks/nest) had increased.

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 5 years.

In 2005, a significant overwash between the Wilderness Visitor Center and Old Inlet provided approximately 4 acres of prime plover habitat in the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness. Fire Island National Seashore's Superintendent Mike Reynolds stated, "We have observed steady progress in the return of the piping plover on Long Island. We are hopeful that this will be another successful year. Everyone's cooperation is truly 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- 289-4810, or visit the park web site at [www.nps.gov/fiis](http://www.nps.gov/fiis).