

## Wildlife Services Aids in Protecting Endangered Piping Plover



In early May, USDA's Wildlife Services program from the Rhinelander district office constructed a gull exclusion grid near Superior, Wisconsin, to increase the safety of potential nesting grounds for the endangered Piping plover. The grid may play a crucial role in the reestablishment of a nesting plover population by limiting the presence of gulls, which eat eggs from the plovers' small, shallow nests. Last year, an exclusion grid on Shaffer Beach quickly produced tracks of some plover, but no nesting occurred.

Other partners in the piping plover project work primarily on habitat improvement, an important task because coastal beaches, traditionally used for nesting, have been lost to development. The partnership includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the St. Louis River Alliance. Piping plovers use wide, flat, open sandy beaches with very little grass or other vegetation. Small creeks and wetlands often may be part of nesting territories.



The birds also are very sensitive to human presence and adults may abandon a nest where too much disturbance takes place. The partners also provide monitors to limit traffic on the beaches where nesting occurs, to observe the impact of protection measures and to check success of the nesting efforts.

The Great Lakes population of piping plover, a migratory small, stocky shorebird, was listed as an endangered species in 1986. The Northern Great Plains and Atlantic Coast populations were listed as threatened that year. Since 1983, the number of nesting pairs in the Great Lakes population has ranged from 12 to 32. In Wisconsin piping plovers currently nest at only one site, a remote beach on Long Island within the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Birds have consistently nested on Long Island since 1998. However, none have nested at Shaffer

Beach. The establishment of a second Wisconsin nesting population at Shaffer Beach would be a tremendous advance for the recovery of the species.

Later in May, Wildlife Services will continue limited and targeted trapping of mammalian predators near the Long Island piping plover nesting grounds. Long Island has been the only successful nesting location in Wisconsin in recent years. The USDA program began limited trapping of predators in 2008, after 40% of plover nests were lost due to predation. In 2012, four nesting pairs successfully fledged 10 chicks, approximately 8% of the Great Lakes population.



This year, 2013, is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Endangered Species Act and May is recognized as Endangered Species Month. The USDA Wildlife Services works with other wildlife management agencies, Tribes, and private groups, using its expertise to assist in recovery of threatened and endangered species. Last year it assisted in projects throughout the country to protect 169 listed species of plants and animals.

For more information about Wildlife Services work on the piping plover project in Wisconsin, please contact Robert Willging at 715-369-5221, extension 11.