

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) FAQs for Beach Patrons

What is the Sandy Neck HCP? The Habitat Conservation Plan or HCP is a program that Sandy Neck participates in, in conjunction with guidelines set at the state and federal level. The HCP at Sandy Neck allows staff to discourage Piping Plover nesting activities in certain areas of the park to hopefully allow for as many recreational opportunities as possible during the shorebird breeding season.

Why are Piping Plovers protected? The Piping Plover is a state and federally Threatened shorebird that nests on Massachusetts Beaches. Piping Plovers are a small species of shorebird that camouflages extremely well in the sandy and cobble areas found throughout their habitat. Due to this adaptation, adult plovers and chicks are extremely susceptible to being crushed by vehicles or accidentally pushed from their territory by hikers and dog walkers. Due to conservation actions of beach managers and landowners, Massachusetts is a leader in Piping Plover conservation. Our population has increased in recent decades, from about 140 pairs in 1986 to now have close to 700 breeding pairs.



How does the Sandy Neck HCP help ORV beach patrons? The HCP helps to maintain and improve public access and recreational opportunities for ORV beach patrons by deterring piping plover nesting activity within the Recreation Zone. With a special permit, Sandy Neck staff is allowed to participate in certain approved activities to make shorebird habitat within the Recreation Zone less appealing to piping plovers looking to nest in that area.



What is the Recreation Zone? The Recreation Zone is the section of beach that falls between the Access Trail and the 0.5 mile marker. The Recreation Zone is where staff spends countless hours early on in the Piping Plover nesting season

focusing on deterrent activities. The Recreation Zone is the only section of the Off-Road Vehicle beach that Sandy Neck staff is allowed to deploy these activities that have been approved by MassWildlife and are covered through our HCP permit.



What are the “activities” that Sandy Neck Staff participate in to discourage piping plovers from nesting? Early in the season, Sandy Neck Staff can often be seen raking the Recreation Zone with a chain drag hitched to the back of a truck.



This allows staff to disrupt the habitat that Piping Plovers prefer to use for nesting. Staff also deploys snow fencing and pallets to use as coverboards, again making nesting habitat less appealing.

What can beach patrons do to help? ORV permit holders should visit the Sandy Neck ORV Beach often during the early spring season! Not only is the beach beautiful in March and April, but recreating at Sandy Neck during the spring can help us to have a successful summer. Be sure to drive in the established ORV travel corridor within the Recreation Zone!

