

# Piping Plover

## Ontario Government Response Statement



Photo: Marie Read

### PROTECTING AND RECOVERING SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario's biodiversity. Biodiversity – the variety of living organisms on Earth – provides us with clean air and water, food, fibre, medicine and other resources that we need to survive.

The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) is the Government of Ontario's legislative commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats. As soon as a species is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the ESA, it is automatically protected from harm or harassment. Also, immediately upon listing, the habitats of endangered and threatened species are protected from damage or destruction.

Under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources (the Ministry) must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides science-based advice to government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STATEMENTS

Within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires the Ministry to publish a statement summarizing the government's intended actions and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The recovery strategy for the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) in Ontario was completed on May 31, 2013 [http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/mnr\\_sar\\_rs\\_ppg\\_plvr\\_en.pdf](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/mnr_sar_rs_ppg_plvr_en.pdf)

The response statement is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. All recommendations provided in the recovery strategy were considered and this response statement identifies those that are considered to be appropriate and necessary for the protection and recovery of the species. In addition to the strategy, the response statement is based on input from stakeholders, other jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities and members of the public. It reflects the best available traditional, local and scientific knowledge at this time and may be adapted if new information becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA allows the Ministry to determine what is feasible, taking into account social and economic factors.

The Piping Plover is a small shorebird with light dry sand colouring on its head and back, with white underparts. In the breeding season, mature individuals have a black band on their breast and another between the eyes. In Ontario, this species can be found on long, wide, sandy beaches.

## MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER PIPING PLOVER

The Piping Plover is listed as an endangered species under the ESA, which protects both the animal and its habitat. The ESA prohibits harm or harassment of the species and damage or destruction of its habitat without authorization. Such authorization would require that conditions established by the Ministry be met.

Although never considered abundant in Ontario, Piping Plovers historically nested at 24 locations on the Great Lakes and were estimated to have reached 70 to 90 breeding pairs until this subpopulation was considered extirpated from the province in 1986. One pair of Piping Plovers returned to Wasaga Beach (Georgian Bay) in 2005 and second pair returned to Sauble Beach (Town of South Bruce Peninsula) in 2007. Since then, Piping Plovers have also been observed at other beaches near Wasaga and Sauble Beaches and on Manitoulin Island. The Great Lakes subpopulation has grown to five breeding pairs, observed in both 2012 and 2013. In southern Ontario, the Great Lakes subpopulation currently occurs on long, wide, sandy beaches; while in northwestern Ontario, the Lake of the Woods subpopulation occurs on sandy/cobble beaches.

In northwestern Ontario, major threats include predation and rising water levels resulting from storm surges. In southern Ontario, the major threats to the species are human disturbance, predation, and habitat loss and degradation. The beach habitats of Piping Plovers attract many beach goers during the warm summer months and these high-use areas present a number of challenges in enabling the use of the beach for recreation while also protecting the species. Increased human use of beaches has reduced the habitat available for nesting Piping Plovers and resulted in the trampling of necessary vegetation and natural debris, alterations to the natural ecological processes that create beach-dune communities, and an increased prevalence of invasive plant species. Activities to maintain the beach for aesthetic purposes, such as beach raking and grooming, can remove cover used by plovers to hide from predators, as well as remove strand lines. A strand line is an area located at the high water mark where natural materials such as vegetation, driftwood and other organic material is deposited; these areas provide both cover from predators and invertebrates for food. Piping Plover is also listed as endangered under the federal Species at Risk Act in Canada.

**The government's goal for the recovery of the Piping Plover is to ensure its persistence along the coasts of the Great Lakes and Lake of the Woods, encourage increases in the number of breeding pairs, and support the expansion of the species to additional suitable breeding habitat in Ontario, where feasible.**

Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or organization has the knowledge, authority or financial resources to protect and recover all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires inter-governmental co-operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities.

In developing the government response statement, the Ministry considered what actions are feasible for the government to lead directly and what actions are feasible for the government to support its conservation partners to undertake.

## GOVERNMENT-LED ACTIONS

To help protect and recover the Piping Plover, the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Encourage the development and implementation of beach management plans that enable continued recreational uses that are compatible with maintaining suitable conditions and natural features for Piping Plover and its habitat.
- Continue to co-operate with federal partners to undertake breeding surveys at five-year intervals, as part of the International Piping Plover Census.
- Continue to implement the Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan to address the invasive species (e.g., *Phragmites australis*) that threaten Piping Plover.
- Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- Encourage the submission of Piping Plover data to the Ministry's central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.
- Protect the Piping Plover and its habitat through the ESA.
- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners, and Aboriginal communities and organizations to undertake activities to protect and recover the Piping Plover. Support will be provided where appropriate through funding, agreements, permits (including conditions) and/or advisory services.
- Establish and communicate annual priority actions for government support in order to encourage collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

## GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED ACTIONS

The government endorses the following actions as being necessary for the protection and recovery of the Piping Plover. Actions identified as “high” will be given priority consideration for funding under the ESA. Where reasonable, the government will also consider the priority assigned to these actions when reviewing and issuing authorizations under the Endangered Species Act. Other organizations are encouraged to consider these priorities when developing projects or mitigation plans related to species at risk. The government will focus its support on these high-priority actions over the next five years.

**Focus Area:** Management and Awareness

**Objective:** Improve habitat at occupied sites and promote stewardship and education about Piping Plover and their habitats to aid in recovery and minimize threats.

**Actions:**

1. **(HIGH)** Develop and implement best management practices to maintain and enhance suitable habitat conditions for Piping Plovers’ breeding and nesting activities, with a focus on appropriate beach management, including retention of strand lines and open beach areas with cover (e.g., driftwood, natural beach vegetation) and minimization of dune erosion, human disturbance and predation.
2. Continue stewardship and outreach initiatives such as promoting ecotourism opportunities and engagement of local residents, businesses, youth, academics, conservation agencies, and Aboriginal communities and organizations, to support the conservation of Piping Plover and its habitat at current and historical locations.

**Focus Area:** Research

**Objective:** Increase knowledge of Piping Plover health, demographics, habitat requirements, and threats.

**Actions:**

3. **(HIGH)** Investigate reproductive success and overall health of Piping Plovers in relation to invertebrate food supply, human disturbance (e.g. impacts on foraging behaviour), and predator populations. Use the knowledge gained from these studies to develop best management practices, mitigation measures, and management alternatives.
4. Research survival, recruitment and movement patterns (e.g. dispersal and foraging distances) of Piping Plover.

**Focus Area:** Inventory and Monitoring

**Objective:** Improve knowledge of the species’ distribution and habitat in Ontario.

**Actions:**

5. Continue to monitor current and recent breeding locations and investigate reports of Piping Plovers at new locations. Expand to survey potential breeding sites and historical nesting beaches as time and resources allow. Work with existing Piping Plover recovery initiatives and U.S. partners across the species’ range to standardize data collection methods, share information, and maintain and improve existing databases.

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Species at Risk Research Fund for Ontario, or the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with the Ministry. The Ministry can also advise if any authorizations under the ESA or other legislation may be required to undertake the project.

Implementation of the actions may be subject to changing priorities across the multitude of species at risk, available resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated across government response statements.

## REVIEWING PROGRESS

The ESA requires the Ministry to conduct a review of progress towards protecting and recovering a species not later than five years from the publication of this response statement. The review will help identify if adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of the Piping Plover.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the "Recovery Strategy for Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) in Ontario" for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.

### **For additional information:**

Visit the species at risk website at [ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)  
Contact your MNR district office  
Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre  
1-800-667-1940  
TTY 1-866-686-6072  
[mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca](mailto:mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca)  
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