

Interior Least Tern and Piping Plover Survey Protocol
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
February 2017

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have identified critical life stages for the interior least tern (tern) and piping plover (plover) that may be directly affected by construction activities in close proximity to nesting areas. Nesting terns and plovers can be disturbed by sights (human presence, visible equipment, etc.) and sounds (loud equipment, banging, etc.) that are not normally found in their environment (roadway traffic is considered “normal”). Tern and plover nests can be crushed by construction equipment. Chicks can be harassed or crushed by construction equipment as well. Together, the agencies have developed the following protocol for project proponents so they are able to avoid construction-related impacts to individual terns or plovers and their nests. In addition to construction-related impacts, Federal and State agencies and project proponents should consider non-construction impacts to individual terns or plovers from the proposed project (e.g., chemical spills, alterations to river stream flow, etc.).

Indicators of Nesting Activity:

- Nesting Behavior: Courtship behaviors, copulations, birds returning to the same place, sitting on the sand for a long period of time, or nest exchange (males and females incubate for varying lengths of time).
- Foraging Behavior: Plovers - looking for food along shoreline, probing the sand; Terns - hovering over river channel or lake, diving into water for fish, and bringing fish back to nest.

Survey Dates:

- Nesting period: April 15 – August 15
- If nesting activity is not observed within the July 1 through July 15 time period, then no further surveys are needed.

Frequency and Timing of Survey:

- Survey at least 3 times a week during nesting period (e.g., Monday, Wednesday, Friday)
- Survey in the morning prior to the start of project/construction activities for the day.
- Surveys must be conducted when there is adequate light to detect and identify birds.
- If cloudy, overcast or foggy – take additional time to ensure a good quality survey.

Method of Survey:

- From a good vantage point, survey areas within 0.25 miles of where project/construction activities will occur.
- Use binoculars or spotting scope to survey for a minimum of 20 minutes.
- Look specifically for bird movements along sandbars in the middle of the channel and/or along the shoreline.

Reporting:

- For each survey, record the following and keep both hard and electronic copies of the record/survey report on file:
 - Surveyor identification;
 - Date;
 - Start and stop times for the survey;
 - Survey location and area;
 - General weather conditions (temperature, foggy, rainy, windy, partially sunny, etc.);
 - Survey results (i.e., birds present or absent); and
 - Summary of bird behavior if birds are observed.

If nesting activity is not observed (see Indicators of Nesting Activity above) project/construction activities may commence. If nesting activity is observed, then further investigation may be needed from a different vantage point or using higher-powered optics to verify if a nest, nesting behavior, or chicks are present. Landowner permission must be obtained before entering private property.

If at any time, a nest, nesting behavior, and/or chicks are observed within 0.25 miles of where project/construction activities will occur:

- Do not start or continue work within 0.25 miles of where the nest, nesting behavior, and/or chicks were observed until Federal and State agencies are contacted.
- Immediately contact the NGPC and the USFWS contacts below for further instructions.
 - Joel Jorgensen, NGPC, office: 402-471-5440; cell: 402-533-0924, or
 - Melissa Marinovich, NGPC, office: 402-471-5422; cell: 402-416-5173
 - Jeff Runge, USFWS, cell: 308-379-8553, or
 - Robert Harms, USFWS, cell: 308-390-0871
- Do not start or resume work until after receiving further instruction from NGPC or USFWS.



Piping Plover (Photo by Joel Trick, USFWS)



Similar species: Killdeer (Photo by Joel Jorgensen, NGPC)



Nesting Least Tern. (Photo by USFWS Arkansas Field Office).



Similar species: Forster's Tern (Photo by Joel Jorgensen, NGPC).