

[From Spring 1997]

## **Piping Plover Return Anticipated**

The first piping plover survey of the season was conducted on Monday, February 24. Although no plovers were sighted on that day, the plovers' return is expected by the time this newsletter reaches you.

A habitat enhancement project has been initiated by the refuge to provide more suitable nesting habitat. Habitat areas that were selected include areas on the Hook and North Wash Flats of the refuge that have become unusable for nesting plovers due to erosion of the beach and overgrown vegetation. The project entails disking vegetation with a tractor in areas where loss of possible nesting habitat has been the most severe. Most of the disking has taken place on the Hook area of the refuge, traditionally the most productive area for piping plovers. Erosion of the beach during the past few years has been the most significant in this area, and efforts to improve the habitat on the Hook have been undertaken to ensure this area remains a suitable nesting site for piping plovers in the future.

The North Wash Flats has also been selected for habitat enhancement. A combination of projects have been completed in an effort to increase the suitability of the Flats as a nesting site for piping plovers. The refuge maintenance staff removed a strip of dense vegetation separating the North-Wash Flats and the Wild Beach areas to provide the opportunity for plovers to move between the Wild Beach and the North Wash Flats. Also some disking of encroaching vegetation will be completed by the end of February to provide maximum nesting space for the birds.

Once again, shells were spread on the Wash Flats to improve nest sites for piping plovers. In previous years, plovers and least terns nested exclusively in areas where the shells were spread. In 1996, no plovers nested on the Wash Flats due to the constant rainfall which flooded the nesting area throughout the spring and summer.

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