

[From Summer 2005]

## **Temporary Closures Protect Piping Plover**

According to Dan Stotts, Acting Refuge Manager, a temporary closure of a portion of parking lot 5 and a portion of the recreational beach will occur to protect a piping plover brood. The Atlantic Coast population of piping plovers has been listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act since 1986.

"The needs of wildlife come first on all national wildlife refuges," said Stotts. "And on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, the needs of the piping plover dictate that staff protect these threatened shorebirds during the brooding season."

This temporary closure is required by the Biological Opinion completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. It outlines the parameters to manage piping plovers and other uses on the refuge. The closure will affect about 150 yards of parking lots, beach and the entire Off-Road Vehicle Zone.

The closure began the first week in June and could be lifted in early to mid-August, once all the chicks in the area have fledged or sooner if the birds move south out of the area. This closure provides maximum plover production while providing for as much public recreation as possible without adversely affecting the chicks.

According to Stotts, since only a small portion of beach and minimal parking spaces will be closed on a temporary basis, beach users should not be significantly affected. "I am not anticipating a change in the number of permitted recreational users or vehicles, with the exception of Off-Road Vehicles. I believe that these measures, coupled with the continued cooperation of the community and our visitors, will ensure the future success of piping plovers in Virginia and will help achieve the goal of increasing the southern population," said Stotts.