Background information

1. **Why plan for plovers and recreation?**
   The Western Snowy Plover is on the federal list of threatened species. A threatened species is one step away from being endangered, and endangered species face extinction. Citizens and government agencies take action to protect and restore threatened species to responsibly manage natural resources. In the case of the plover, three main forces have combined to threaten their survival: first, changes to the places they need to live, feed, and raise their young. Second, predators—some native, some introduced by people—take more plovers than are replaced by natural reproduction. Third, people can accidentally harm or disturb birds while the plovers nest, feed and raise their young.

   To help the plover survive and recover, all three forces—habitat, predators and people—have to be managed. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is legally responsible for recreation on the ocean shore. We have two basic choices when it comes to plovers.

   First, don't plan ahead. Two results are likely from this approach. Plovers harmed on the ocean shore, even accidentally, could bring serious penalties from the federal government. The bird could also choose to nest in new, unpredicted areas. Were that to happen, the state would have to protect the plover—and perhaps even bar people from entering the area—no matter where the nesting site is along the ocean shore.

   Second, instead of doing nothing, the Department could *write a plan to help plovers recover in a few key areas*—the ones with the best chance of supporting the bird and helping it recover. A good plan would share the beach; people would know where and when they need to be careful as they play on the ocean shore, and land managers would know where to focus their attention to improve habitat and control predators.

   We decided the predictability of a plan—the **Habitat Conservation Plan**—would be better for Oregonians who live near or visit the ocean shore, and be better for the plover's recovery. Since the Plan concentrates attention on certain areas of the coast, there's a chance plovers could be harmed on some other Oregon beaches. To protect itself from the consequences of accidentally harming plovers in unprotected areas, the state needs something called an **Incidental Take Permit** from the federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

2. **What is an Incidental Take Permit and a Habitat Conservation Plan?**
   "Take" is the word used by the Federal Endangered Species Act to describe anything that harms the protected species. Obvious acts like killing or injuring a plover are covered by this word, but so are not-so-obvious things like chasing, interrupting feeding, or scaring birds off nests. "Take" doesn't have to be intentional to be serious; it can be accidental.

   If the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department manages recreation on the ocean shore under an Incidental Take Permit issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, accidental harm to the plover will be tolerated, as long as it doesn't threaten the plover's prospects for recovery and we're doing our best to help the plover species recover in other places on the ocean shore.

In exchange for the permit, we commit to use a Habitat Conservation Plan to designate areas where we and other land managers on the Oregon ocean shore will do our best to help the plover recover. The Plan spells out the kinds of predator control, habitat restoration and changes to recreation needed to help the plover recover. If plover nests appear in areas **outside** the areas designated by the Plan, the individual nest would be protected, but there wouldn't be any changes to the kinds of recreation people enjoy nearby.

3. **What is the real goal for plovers?**
   The national goal for the plover is the same as for all threatened species: to get off the Endangered Species List. For this west coast bird, this means an average of 3,000 breeding adults per year for 10 years in Washington, Oregon and California. Oregon and Washington together need to support 250 breeding plovers. Numbers are not the only measure of success. Plovers need reliable places to successfully breed, spend the winter and feed to prevent them from backsliding, and becoming threatened with extinction again. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will help reach this number within the Ocean Shore Recreation Area, where it is responsible for managing recreation.

4. **What is already being done for plovers in Oregon?**
   State and federal agencies have worked for the past 15 years to help plovers recover on the south Oregon coast by improving habitat, controlling predators—like crows, ravens and foxes—and shifting recreation away from nests to nearby areas. We use ropes and signs to help visitors understand the dry sand boundaries where plovers are nesting, and talk to people directly about the bird and how they can help it recover. Most people are very interested in the bird's story. Eight areas on the south coast have been successfully managed for plovers.

5. **How has recreation been affected in the areas already being managed?**
   People share the beach with plovers on the south coast. During the nesting season, ropes and signs direct people around the protected dry sand nesting areas. The wet sand remains open, though sometimes the trail that people take to reach the ocean has to be re-routed. Dogs stay on leashes in these areas, which also reduces the number of complaints from people who visit the beach (dogs are prohibited completely from one area—Siltcoos).

6. **What is the status of Oregon's plover population, and how has it changed in the managed areas?**
   Plover numbers have climbed from fewer than 50 in 1993 to more than 120 in 2007, thanks to the careful management of predators, habitat and recreation on the south coast. To help fulfill the Pacific Northwest's potential for plover recovery, coordinated management will be used in other, new areas on the ocean shore.

7. **Have any unoccupied areas become occupied after management began?**
   Plovers returned to areas they historically called home after government agencies restored their habitat, controlled predators and managed recreation. Some of these areas were next to places the plovers were using, but one was completely cut off from the other areas. Plovers started using this area (the Dunes Overlook) only after restoration began.

8. **What does Oregon have to promise to do in order to receive an Incidental Take Permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?**
   There are some general requirements involving consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, but we must also agree that any harm to the plover will be accidental and minor, and related to the kinds of recreation already permitted on the ocean shore. We also have to make sure we fund and follow the Habitat Conservation Plan.

9. **Under the Habitat Conservation Plan, what else will be managed *aside* from recreation?**
   We also need to improve the habitat and control predators in areas where plovers already nest. In areas where we want plovers to begin nesting, habitat is key. Making the dry sand welcoming to plovers will require action to remove invasive plant species and return the dunes to their original, native shape.

Specific questions, specific answers

10. **What does the habitat plan mean on each beach?**
    On six beaches *where plovers already nest* …

    Sutton/Baker Beach (USFS)
    Siltcoos Estuary/Dunes Overlook/Tahkenitch Estuary (USFS)
    Tenmile Estuary (USFS)
    Coos Bay North Spit (USBLM, Corps)
    New River (USBLM, Coos and Curry Counties, Private)
    Bandon State Natural Area

    … you will see much of the same protection used in past years: fences around some areas of dry sand where the plovers nest and public education from March 15 to September 15. People will have to walk around the fencing to reach the wet sand. Vehicles are already off-limits in these areas. New changes: no kite flying or dogs. Plovers can react to kites much as they do to winged predators—by leaving their nests. This could harm a plover's chance of nesting successfully. If no nests are active inside the area by July 15, the fences could come down and recreation returns to normal.

    On parts of four beaches *owned or leased by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department where plovers do **not** nest* …

    Columbia River South Jetty
    Necanicum Spit
    Nehalem Spit
    Netarts Spit

    … site plans will be drawn up for the first three sites—the south jetty, Necanicum and Nehalem. Under the plans, some parts of the dry sand in each area will be managed to encourage plover nesting. Dogs will have to be leashed, and no motorized or non-motorized vehicles will be permitted. There will be some work on habitats and predator control. The other site—Netarts Spit—will be held in reserve and possibly managed for plovers later (see the timeline below for details).

On parts of six beaches *owned or managed by other agencies (or people) where plovers do not nest, or adjacent to federal sites …*

Bayocean Spit
South Sand Lake Spit
Tahkenitch South
Umpqua River North Jetty
Elk River Spit
Euchre Creek

… plover management will only begin after the land manager asks for it—and after consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—**unless** nesting begins on its own at these sites. The details will vary a little from place to place, but will generally be similar to the other beaches where plovers don't nest (dogs on leash, no vehicles).

11. **In what year will the different management changes happen?**
In some ways, the timing is predictable. After the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awards Oregon an Incidental Take Permit, a couple of things happen.

For areas where plovers already nest, the new changes (affecting dogs and kites) would happen **the next nesting season**. The one exception is Bandon, where the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will have **one year** to write a habitat and recreation plan. It will include the same sorts of changes affecting the other areas where plovers nest (dogs and kites, directing people to the wet sand, etc.) The plan, once approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, would be put into action.

Two years after the permit is awarded, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will create plans for the three northern beaches where plovers do not nest—the Columbia River South Jetty, Necanicum Spit and Nehalem Spit.

All the other sites will wait in the wings until certain conditions are met, and this is where the timing becomes subject to our success with plover recovery.

If plovers *don't* nest in any of the three northern state park sites within **five years,** and *none* of the other six beaches run by other landowners have started to help with plover recovery, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will start to manage part of Netarts Spit for plovers.

If plovers *do* move into a new site, the new site will be managed just like all the other sites where plovers nest, with the same recreation rules. Once plovers start to use a new site, management will start on one of the beaches not being managed for plovers.

12. **How does management of occupied and unoccupied areas differ?**
Sites with plovers are all managed the same way during the nesting season: no vehicles, dogs or kite-flying, and other recreation will be directed to the wet sand. A limited area on the dry sand, marked by a fence, will be closed to beach camping, beach fires and picnicking.

Sites with no plovers fall into two categories. First, some will be managed to help plovers recover. During the nesting season, the area will be kept vehicle-free (most areas already are), and dogs must be leashed. Second, other unoccupied areas won't be actively managed on a set schedule, but could eventually be managed to attract plovers.

13. **How will plover management under this plan affect the economy?**
    The draft impact statement studied this question. If a new recreation rule forced a visitor to leave one region of the coast, or to not visit the coast at all, it could take money out of a local economy. For sites where plovers nest, visitors don't have far to travel—a hundred yards or so in most cases—to find a place for things like kite flying, beach camping, picnicking and other beach play. Where plovers don't nest, the only significant new rule is "no vehicles," a rule already in place in many areas. As a result, the economic effect of the plan should be very minor.

14. **What has changed between the first set of meetings on the plover plan and the current draft?**
    The original version of the habitat conservation plan was drafted and sent out for public comment in 2004. Oregon Parks and Recreation Department staff amended the plan and created an interim draft, clarifying which sites the department will actively manage to help plovers recover, and which beaches other agencies and owners will manage voluntarily. In 2009, more work was done to clarify federal land. The final document covers fewer beaches, and describes a more workable year-by-year schedule for managing sites that don't have nesting plovers (see Question 12 above). The new plan also deals with change in a more flexible way, adapting to unexpected successes and downturns by starting management or removing recovery sites as needed.

15. **How will we help visitors understand how to share the beach with plovers?**
    The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will design a plover outreach program that dovetails with established interpretive programs, expanding it to reach more visitors and beaches as they come online for management. The department has hired three Beach Rangers and will recruit volunteers to meet people, talk about plovers and the importance of the recovery, and provide information to visitors about sharing the beach. Beach-specific management plans will have more details on the use of signs, brochures, websites and interpretive programs.

16. **How were the effects of plover management evaluated?**
    The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department hired a consulting firm, Jones & Stokes, to evaluate three options: doing nothing, using the first draft plan, and using the current draft. They looked at the effects of existing recreation, and noted how bird numbers have increased in areas where habitat, recreation and predators are managed. They determined the possible the effects of habitat restoration and other management on the bird population, and estimated the increasing number of beach visitors over time. This information was used to predict the effect of the plan on plover locations and numbers.

Jones & Stokes determined that while recreation plays a role in reducing plover numbers, the plan's protections, habitat restoration and predator control should provide enough benefit to compensate and help plovers recover. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will review the Jones & Stokes report to decide whether or not the plan helps enough plovers to counteract any accidental harm done by recreation, and if it does help plovers, issue Oregon an Incidental Take Permit.

17. **How long will we manage for plovers?**
    The plan and Incidental Take Permit cover 25 years. If plovers are still threatened after that, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will meet with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to review the plan and decide if different conservation measures would be required to extend the permit. If the plover recovers in fewer than 25 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide how to keep plover numbers steady as the bird is removed from the threatened list.

18. **What happens if plovers don't move into new areas in spite of management?**
    The areas selected for plover recovery *used* to have plovers, and with a little work, should support them again. Even so, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will evaluate the recovery every year, and work together to decide if the plan should be tweaked to achieve success.