

## PIPING PLOVER



### **Background:**

The piping plover, a shorebird of open beaches, alkali flats, and sandy areas, breeds along major rivers, reservoirs and wetlands in the northern Great Plains from Alberta through Nebraska. Fewer than 2,800 breeding pairs of piping plovers were reported in the U.S. and Canada in 1995, about half of which were in the Great Plains region.

Little attention was paid to the piping plover in Montana until its listing as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1985. Work on this species is coordinated by the Montana Piping Plover Recovery Committee, a group led by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in cooperation with several state and federal agencies (including Reclamation) and other interested birders.

Nesting habitat in Montana is primarily un-vegetated sand-pebble beaches or islands in freshwater and saline wetlands and shorelines and exposed beds of larger reservoirs and rivers in the north-central and eastern portions of Montana. Although Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge and nearby wetlands account for almost 80% of the piping plover production in Montana, nesting also occurs on the Missouri River below Fort Peck, Nelson Reservoir and Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuges. Annual nesting site surveys have been conducted since 1987 throughout the state as coordinated by the Montana Piping Plover Recovery Committee.



### **Montana Area Office Monitoring Efforts:**

Nelson Reservoir, with miles of beach habitat, has seen documented nesting by piping plovers. The primary function of the reservoir is irrigation, which results in fluctuating water levels dependent upon availability and demand for water. As a result of the fluctuations and known plover nesting, Reclamation completed ESA consultation on operation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As a result of this consultation, Reclamation works cooperatively with the FWS to monitor the reservoir during the breeding season to ensure plovers are not lost to fluctuating reservoir levels.

Additionally, an international piping plover survey involving 26 states, three Canadian provinces, seven countries, and more than 1,000 volunteers was undertaken in 1991. The survey has been repeated and expanded every five years thereafter to attempt to monitor trends in bird populations. Reclamation participates in these surveys at reservoirs identified as potentially providing suitable nesting habitat. These reservoirs include Nelson, Fresno, Tiber, Clark Canyon and Canyon Ferry.

### **Tiber Reservoir:**

At Tiber Reservoir, Stan Huhtala and Dave Allen spent the 14 of June going around looking for any sign of piping plovers, but found none. They did see plenty of common terns, geese, spotted sandpipers and killdeer. The lake level was up and gravel areas were not as plentiful as at other times when the water level was down. There has been no record of piping plovers being found at Tiber, but about 70 miles west, at Alkali Lake on the Blackfeet Reservation, some have been seen.

At Canyon Ferry Reservoir, Sue Camp and Justin Kucera went out on a boat and surveyed all the available shoreline at the south end on Wednesday, June 28, looking for any sign of piping plovers, but found none. They did see some killdeer.

