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Article published May 4, 2001

## Great Lakes shore to be plover habitat

BY [TOM HENRY](#)  
 BLADE STAFF WRITER



Only 30 nesting pairs of piping plovers are known to live in the Great Lakes region. NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION

A mere two ounces and only six inches long, the piping plover is a rare shorebird known to be finicky about the beaches and sand dunes where it chooses to live.

But the tiny bird soon will cause sizable problems for some marina owners, developers, and other property owners along 201 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, including some just an hour east of Toledo.

Federal biologists yesterday announced that they have filed papers to have that amount of Great Lakes shoreline designated as "critical habitat" for the bird. The shorelines along Erie County near Sandusky Bay and in Lake County are among 35 areas in eight states that would be included for protection under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program, officials said.

With only 30 nesting pairs throughout the Great Lakes region - mostly in northern Michigan - the piping plover has been listed by the wildlife service as an endangered species in this part of the country since 1986.

Although no nesting pairs of the piping plover are known to exist in Ohio, Erie and Lake counties are among the designated areas because of their habitat potential, officials said.

The species will not be removed from this area's endangered list until the Great Lakes region has at least 150 nesting pairs. The bird is considered a threatened species in the only other two areas it is known to live, the North Atlantic and the Great Plains, according to Laura Ragan, biologist at the fish and wildlife's regional office in Fort Snelling, Minn.

The designation will mean little to sunbathers, except that they might see an occasional sign while strolling along a beach, she said.

But property owners planning to build a marina, dredge a channel, develop beach property, or offer recreation such as all-terrain vehicle use will have to

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pass an extra layer of government scrutiny if they are using federal money or doing work that requires a federal permit. Projects with no federal strings attached are exempt, Ms. Ragan said.

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Being sensitive to contaminants and the impact of human development, piping plovers are considered a species that is an indicator of the ecological health of a region. One reason for their decline: Food scraps left behind by humans have drawn predators such as raccoons, gulls, foxes, and stray cats, Jack Dingedine, wildlife service biologist, said.

The final version of the habitat plan is to be published Monday in the Federal Register. The policy is to take effect in early June, officials said.

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