

(Neb.)-Lake McConaughy Visitors Reminded To Share The Sand With Terns And Plovers

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 07/05/2013 12:52 PM

(LINCOLN)—Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area’s visitors are being reminded to give interior least terns and piping plovers their space as beaches become crowded over the weekends.

Lake McConaughy Park Superintendent Colby Johnson says, “It is a critical period for these birds because not only are some pairs still on nests, but other pairs are tending to broods. Park visitors can help protect the birds and ensure that we can strike the right balance between human recreation and endangered species conservation.”

Visitors are asked to follow these steps:

- Do not enter marked or fenced-off nesting areas.
- When possible, stay clear of areas clearly marked for the birds
- Obey all signs.
- Keep all pets on leashes.

In addition to the above, visitors are reminded that all-terrain vehicles are not allowed on LakeMcConaughy’s beaches. With stepped-up enforcement during the summertime, violators should be aware of the increased possibility of being cited.

Interior least terns and piping plovers are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act and the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Act. Persons killing, harming, disturbing or harassing these birds, or allowing their pets to do so, can be prosecuted under the law. Maximum penalties are up to a \$100,000 fine and up to one year in jail or both. Johnson adds, “The recreational opportunities we’ll be able to provide at LakeMcConaughy will be linked to our collective capacity to avoid conflicts between birds and recreation.”

Piping plovers and interior least terns nest together on expanses of bare or sparsely vegetated sand near water. Nests blend in perfectly, and the eggs appear not much more than small rocks. Both species’ tiny chicks are similarly camouflaged and vulnerable, a problem when prime nesting habitat is also attractive to people for recreation.

Lake McConaughy is one of the state’s most important nesting areas for Piping Plovers. The number of nesting pairs is variable, ranging from a couple dozen to a couple hundred. The number of nesting pairs is linked to the amount of available habitat. Only a small number of Interior Least Terns nest annually at Lake McConaughy. The nesting season for both species extends from mid-April to mid-August. Efforts to protect the birds are led by the lake’s owner, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

--Nebraska Game and Parks Commission