

*Membership Meeting
Sunday February 5, 2012*

Seeking Swifts

Larry Schwitters

1:30 pm – 3 pm

*Hoquiam Public Library Meeting Room
7th & K Street, Hoquiam*

January/February 2012



The Sandpiper

Western Snowy Plover critical habitat proposal reopened for comment **Public invited to review draft document**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced the availability of a draft Economic Analysis of its proposed revision of critical habitat for the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover. The Service also seeks public comment on proposed changes to the revision proposed in March 2011. The proposed changes are the result of new information received after publication of the revision proposed in March.

The proposed rule and notice of availability of the draft Economic Analysis will be published in the Federal Register Tuesday, Jan.17, 2012, but an advance copy is available today for viewing at <http://www.federalregister.gov>. Comments will be accepted on the proposed critical habitat revision and the draft Economic Analysis until February 17, 2011.

The Service is proposing to designate 30,497 acres of critical habitat in 68 units in Washington, Oregon and California. The March 2011 proposal included 28,261 acres in 68 units.

The draft Economic Analysis estimates costs associated with the proposed critical habitat designation to be about \$261,000 over a 20-year timeframe. More than 70 percent of the estimated impacts are related to military activities on Vandenberg Air Force Base, which did not have an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) in place at the time the Service published the proposed critical habitat rule in March. The Air Force Base has now completed an INRMP, and if the Service determines the plan provides a benefit to the western snowy plover, the Air Force base will be exempted from the revised final critical habitat designation.

New information received during the initial comment period on the proposed rule has also resulted in proposed changes to critical habitat in Unit 46, which includes portions of Bolsa Chica State Beach and Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve in Orange County, California. Based on new information about snowy plover use of habitat in Unit 46 (which includes subunits 46A-E), the Service is proposing to remove some areas because they are no longer

occupied by the western snowy plover and adding some areas that are occupied by the species and are essential to its conservation. The Service is also proposing to add one new 2-acre subunit (46F) in the muted tidal basin portion of Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve because it is a nesting and foraging area used by the snowy plover.

In addition to revisions to the March 2011 proposed rule and availability of the draft Economic Analysis, the Service is also seeking public comments to taxonomic changes accepted by the American Ornithological Union (AOU) resulting from genetic work splitting the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*) from the snowy plover (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*; formerly *C. alexandrinus nivosus*).



Photo by Ron Le Valley

www.LeValleyPhoto.com

The Pacific Coast western snowy plover is a small shorebird with pale brown to gray upper parts, gray to black legs and bill, and dark patches on the forehead, behind the eyes, and on either side of the upper breast. The Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover is defined as those individuals nesting adjacent to tidal waters of the Pacific Ocean, and includes all nesting birds on the mainland coast, peninsulas, offshore islands, adjacent bays, estuaries and coastal rivers. The Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover breeds primarily on coastal beaches from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico.

Compared to the existing 2005 critical habitat designation of 12,145 acres in 32 units, the 2011 proposed revision includes more than twice as many

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The President's Perch



By Arnie Martin

Even more dust up

The coal export proponents are making progress in their plans to build a facility at Terminal 3, near the Hoquiam Sewage Lagoon. What are the obstacles that the coal proponents must overcome?

The Port of Grays Harbor has begun (or possibly completed) dredging operations to deepen the moorage at Terminal 3 to 42 Ft below mean low-low water. This will allow the docking and full loading of a Panamax ship (39.5 Ft loaded draft).

As I write this, I am watching the maintenance-dredging of the channel by a floating crane, owned by American Construction of Tacoma, which is working to maintain the depth at 40 feet. There is a study planned by the Port in conjunction with the Corps of Engineers to deepen the channel to a depth of 42 feet. The study concerns how to dispose of the dredging spoils resulting from the deepening. A 42 foot channel would allow the passage of a loaded Panamax ship, even with a small amount of siltation from spring flooding.

The Puget Sound and Pacific rail line which runs from Centralia/Chehalis through Oakville, Elma, Montesano, Aberdeen, and ends in Hoquiam has several maintenance and improvement projects being completed or studied. The railroad bridges over the Wishkah and the Hoquiam rivers need maintenance work, and the Hoquiam bridge needs some damage repairs to the “dolphins” that support the bridge span in the open position. Both bridges need strengthening to allow trains crossing them to proceed at faster speeds (10 mph versus the current 5 mph). Higher speeds would allow the 1-1/2 mile long unit trains to proceed past the Gateway mall area with less blockage time for the many rail crossings there.

One of our Audubon board members, Steve Hallstrom, did some investigating and found the following: “There is a second track being laid between Gibson and Cedar Creek about 5 miles north of Oakville. According to the farmer who was required to move his fence and whose building will be within feet of the new alignment, this will be a bypass track 2 miles long to let trains pass each other. The project is being done by Rognlin of Aberdeen and is scheduled for completion in July [2012]. Work is ongoing 7 days a week. At

this time most of the trees have been cut and some grade completed.”

This bypass track is necessary to allow unit trains, both the current Chrysler cars and AGP soybeans to pass (when one is arriving loaded and one is empty), as well as possible future coal unit trains travelling to and from Port Terminal 3. The 2 mile length of the bypass would allow unit trains of up to 125 – 150 cars to pass one another.

The planned filling of the Eastern portion of the Hoquiam sewage lagoon was to accommodate the spoils from the construction of the Pontoon casting basin for the SR-520 floating bridge. The cleaning of the biosolids from the lagoon was required by the State of Washington and EPA regulations. The filling, when completed, will allow room for the coal unit trains to gradually loop into the unloading facility, at the expense of closing a portion of Airport Road, or having a major realignment of the current path of the road.

All of the above maintenance and construction projects are separately explainable based on good stewardship practices and on the desire to upgrade the facilities. Together, with all of them occurring nearly simultaneously, there seems to be a plan to do the advance work to support the coal export facility in a piecemeal process.

The logic behind this assertion is that exporting 5 million metric tons of coal a year will require one mile and a half long unit train loaded travelling into Terminal 3, and one empty returning for a future load, every day, 365 days a year. This train traffic will need to have a bypass track (the new construction between Gibson and Cedar creeks north of Oakville), and upgrades to the existing tracks and bridges to allow higher train speeds. The upgrade will also accommodate passing unit trains carrying Chrysler cars as well as the AGP soybean trains.

Having the coal export unit trains unloading at the Port terminal 3 will require a rail loop so the mile and a half long unit trains do not have to be broken into shorter lengths for unloading and re-assembled later. The reclaimed land on the eastern end of the Hoquiam sewage lagoon will help accommodate the unit trains without the need to break them into shorter lengths due to space limitations.

Deepening of the berthing area at Port terminal 3 doesn't seem necessary to accommodate loaded ships waiting there for space at terminals 2 and 4, as the ships which enter Grays Harbor are nearly always arriving to pickup a load, not to unload. The 42 foot berth depth is just right to accommo

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Snowy Plover continued from page 1

total acres and more critical habitat units. This is partly to offset anticipated adverse effects of rising sea level due to climate change, and also to reflect current policy direction that encourages more consideration of the role unoccupied habitat can provide for the conservation of species.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat

Since the species was listed as threatened, many local groups have voluntarily worked to protect plovers and their breeding areas, and to help educate the beach-using public about the bird's needs. In many areas, beach users have cooperated with local interests to improve the breeding situation for plovers.

Biologists estimate that no more than 2,270 snowy plovers breed along the Pacific Coast of the United States. The largest number of breeding birds occurs south of San Francisco Bay to southern Baja. The species' decline has been attributed to loss of nesting habitat, human disturbance, encroachment of European beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) on nesting grounds, and predation.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains species like the Pacific Coast population of western snowy plover – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our communities.

The notice will officially publish in the Federal Register on January 17, 2012, but an advance copy is available today for viewing at <http://www.federalregister.gov>.

The Service is seeking comments and information on all aspects of this proposed rule and will accept comments and information until Friday, February 17, 2012.

Comments and information can be submitted

electronically to www.regulations.gov. In the box that reads "Enter Keyword or ID," enter the Docket number for this finding, which is FWS-R8-ES-2010-0070. Check the box that reads "Open for Comment/Submission," and then click the Search button. You will see an icon that reads "Submit a Comment." Please ensure that you have found the correct rulemaking before submitting your comment.

If submitting comments by hard copy or hand delivery, please send them to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R8-ES-2010-0070, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

The deadline for submission of a final revised critical habitat designation to the Federal Register is June 5, 2012.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

Note: A listing and maps of the proposed critical habitat units, a link to the Federal Register, and other information is available on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/arcata/>.



Photo by Kerry Ross

Perch continued from page 2

date the draft of a Panamax (Panama Canal maximum width, length, and draft) ship at 39.5 feet. This is the typical size ship that would be used to transport Powder River Basin coal to Asia.

Is there also an unannounced plan to build another container shipping port on the Harbor which would require channel and berth deepening? At least a container port only has problems with the emission of noise, visual pollution, diesel soot and exhaust fumes, but presumably no toxic coal dust.

When will we hear that the coal export proponents, RailAmerica, have begun their permitting processes to begin the construction of the railcar unloading and ship loading facility at the Port's Terminal 3? Or has the process already begun and it is just being kept quiet for now?

Welcome to the paranoia that comes when a large project is being planned with several seemingly separate items, proceeding simultaneously, that will when completed, allow the construction of the project which was publicly proposed in August of 2011?



Results of the 2011 Grays Harbor Christmas Bird Count

By Dianna Moore

On Friday, December 30th, 32 hardy souls fanned out across the edges of Grays Harbor to count birds. It was a slower than usual day, meaning fewer species, 128 compared to 131 for the 2010 count, and fewer individual birds, 32,855 for 2011 compared to 36,188 for the 2010 count

We suspect the weather was to blame...of course... it was cold and windy, with intermittent rain, hail and sleet, and even a few sunbreaks. At one point my team of three despaired of finding any Black-capped Chickadees...that just isn't normal at all!

We more than made up for a lack of quantity by the quality of our finds; the King (Queen) Eider still calls Ocean Shores home after 2+ years of being counted off Damon Point, an Emperor Goose (at least one) was seen and photographed by our own Dalene Edgar on the Ocean Shores golf course, and then we had 13 Snowy Owls out on Damon Point, a single Snow Goose out on

Bowerman Field in Hoquiam, a single Cinnamon Teal over in the Ocosta area, a late Turkey Vulture just above Stafford Creek, 48 Bald Eagles, and a rare Iceland Gull found in Westport.

The largest number of any one species was a whopping 16,602 Dunlin, and we had quite a few no-shows, including the number 1 bird I want to find in Grays Harbor County, preferably my own back yard, a Brown Creeper. Not a one on this count. I had to bow to the Satsop CBC on the 26th for finding the only one in the county...at least as reported to me.

The best news as far as I was concerned was the lack of Brown Pelicans this count; only 7 were found, all in Westport. Some of you may recall how shocked I was to see the total from 2010 of 520 pelicans, long overdue for their migration to warmer climates. I don't want to see those kinds of numbers ever again.

As for the Satsop CBC, we had just a few show up for a last-minute change in our compiler, but those of us who joined in the fun were once again surprised by the changes from the 2010 count. Mary O'Neil and I had downtown Elma and out to the north of town and south to Blockhouse. Unlike last year, there was little standing water in places where we had previously seen flooded fields full of waterfowl. We had to "make do" with a male Kestrel bashing a worm in the middle of the road, and an unexpected bonus of 74 Mourning Doves in just two yards in an Elma neighborhood. After seeing so many Eurasian Collared-Doves in the last 4 years, these smaller doves that used to be so common were easily distinguished from their larger, paler cousins that are now taking over the area.

Despite wind and rain, hail and sleet, we had a good time; birding is such a treat! It was also a chance to visit with birders we see just a few times a year, and that makes for a great party.

GHAS Mission

The mission of the Grays Harbor Audubon Society is to seek a sustainable balance between human activity and the needs of the environment, and to promote enjoyment of birds and the natural world

Membership meeting

Vaux's Swift Program

Our program for Feb 5th is "Seeking Swifts", presented by Larry Schwitters. He holds a Master of Science degree, taught mostly Middle School for 30 years, and has become the guy to ask about all things swifts. He now heads up the Vaux's Happening Project for Audubon and has also done work for the American Bird Conservancy re: Black Swifts.

For those of you who follow Tweepers, he has had live webcams established at an elementary school chimney in Monroe where you can see the Vaux's Swifts as they roost in the chimney (including night vision abilities), and their arrivals and departures.

Come join us at our new venue, the Hoquiam Library, on Sunday Feb 5th from 1:30 to 3PM. The library is located at the corner of 7th and K Streets, park in back off of K St. and enter through the door to the right of the "back" doors.

Vaux Facts

Vaux's Swift is the smallest swift in North America.

Vaux's Swifts roost communally, by the hundreds or sometimes the thousands, presumably to conserve heat. They let their body temperature drop and become torpid on cold nights, reviving in the warmth of day.

Vaux's Swifts descend into their roost tree essentially at once, spiraling down in a very dramatic rush at nightfall.

Vaux's Swift is named for William S. Vaux, a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences and a friend of John K. Townsend, who first described the species. The name is pronounced "vawks," not "voh."

Vaux's Swift
Chaetura vauxi



LEGEND	
■	Year Round
■	Summer (breeding)
■	Winter (non-breeding)
■	Migration

Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Range data by NatureServe

GHAS Board of Directors

Cecelia Boulais	273-9280	letusfarm@earthlink.net
Steve Hallstrom	273-9280	letusfarm@earthlink.net
Arnie Martin	612-0437	arnold6.martin@comcast.net
Dianna Moore	289-5048	dlmoor2@coastaccess.com
Mary O'Neil	533-9833	deed2et2et@yahoo.com
Linda Orgel	648-2476	ldotorg@olearycreek.com
Diane Schwickerath	495-3101	deananddiane@gmail.com
Lynn Smith	(253) 267-9850	sylviasmith6057@msn.com
Janel Spaulding	538-4212	jspauldi@ghc.edu
Janet Strong	495-3950	strongjan@centurytel.net



Olympic Birdfest 2012 March 30-April 1, In Sequim, WA

A bird watching vacation for beginners to experts, from leisurely strolls to active hikes. Bird for a few hours, or all day ... from the dawn chorus to the evening owl prowling.

Enjoy the show from guided birding trips, boat tours, a silent auction, banquet, totem tour, and many other events.

Our festival has a full slate of extraordinary offerings awaiting you.

Also this year! Stay on for a three-day, birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands. Register separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon

BirdFest program information and registration can be found at

www.olympicbirdfest.org

For assistance contact

info@olympicbirdfest.org or 360-681-4076

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Vice President	Mary O'Neil 533-9833 deed2et2et@yahoo.com
Treasurer	Diane Schwickerath 495-3101 deananddiane@gmail.com
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Conservation	Janet Strong, 495-3950 strongjan@centurytel.net
Education	Vacant
Field Trips	Dianna Moore 289-5048 dlmoor2@coastaccess.com
Habitat	Steve Hallstrom 273-9280 letusfarm@earthlink.net
Hospitality	Linda Orgel 648-2476 ldotorg@olearycreek.com
Membership	Dianna Moore 289-5048 dlmoor2@coastaccess.com
Newsletter	R.D. Grunbaum, 648-2476 rd@olearycreek.com
Program Chair	Dianna Moore 289-5048 dlmoor2@coastaccess.com
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Other Audubon Contacts

GHAS voice mail	(360) 289-5048
National Audubon	(212) 979-3000
GHAS Website	http://ghas.org



Please Fill Out and Mail Back

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**Grays Harbor Audubon Society
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Montesano, WA 98563**

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News & Editorial

send materials to
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Westport, 98595-1044
or email to
rd@olearycreek.com
Copy deadline ongoing

Membership Meeting
Sunday, February 5, 2012
1:30 - 3:00PM
Hoquiam Library
downstairs meeting room

Seeking Swifts
Larry Schwitters

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How Do I Know When My Membership Is Due?

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give you your renewal date!*

The Sandpiper

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