

A Tale of Conflict: Wildlife Interactions Along Our Coast
The Beaches Conference
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Moderator: Abigail Lyon, Piscataqua Region Estuary Partnership
Note Taker: Amanda Stone, UNH Cooperative Extension

- Beaches are busy places and home to many shorebirds, invertebrates etc. as well as being highly populated. Panel will discuss interactions with wildlife.
- Three 15-min presentations

Presentation 1: Piping Plovers, least terns

- Both are beach habitat specialists and rely on camouflage
- PP Chicks move a lot and very rapidly. They freeze when scared. This makes managing and protecting challenging
- Threats to Plovers -habitat loss through development, many predators, human disturbance, tides and sea level rise
- Exclosures allow birds to come out but don't let predators in
- Management involves predator exclosures, predator control, work with beach owners/managers – helps reduce chick mortality
- Cultivate volunteer programs, build relationships
- Fledgling pairs in Maine – 68 nesting pairs last year was a high, but this year the numbers have dropped 20%
- Restrictions on driving on the beach and raking the beach -driving compacts sand and inhibits dune growth
- Beach raking removes essential nutrients from the beach
- Work closely with public works employees
- Wrack is essential for dune growth and a healthy beach – raking removes the wrack
- For healthy beaches, need seaweed management (remove excess but leave enough), dune fencing and signage, dune restoration planting, What plovers need is what beaches need too.

Presentation 2: Migrating Shorebirds - Pam Hunt

- Starting in July, a whole other set of birds arrives
- Migrant Shorebirds – around 30 species of shorebirds migrate through NH and ME each spring and fall. These birds are renowned for their migrations involving thousands of miles – as many as 7,000 miles
- Over 200,000 semipalmated sandpipers have been known to congregate in the Bay of Fundy each fall

- The red knot is the only federally listed shorebird species that migrate by the hundreds of thousands.
- Approximately 2000 Semipalmated Plovers and 2,000 Semipalmated sandpipers move through coastal NH each year. Most of them stop to feed in the Hampton Seabrook estuary. The Fall migrations is much more protected than the spring and involves significantly more birds.
- Eskimo Curlew was the most abundant shorebird by no verified sightings since the early 1960s
- Threats to migrating shorebirds – hunting, human disturbance, habitat loss and change
- Different activities/threats can have different effects on shorebirds. Beach driving can be a big issue. Free running dogs are likely one of the biggest threats – they chase birds back and forth. Beach goers are not as much of an issue
- Mechanical beach raking with large machines, that pull up the wrack can be a huge issue. Leave the natural stuff on the beach in the fall to protect the beach and the birds
- Coastal engineering – seawalls – destroy shorebird habitat. As the beaches get smaller, there are fewer places for birds to go.
- Conservation actions: educate beach goers, restrict timing of beach modification, protect important habitats.
- When on the beach, give the birds space and keep dogs away from them.
- We don't know yet where the migrant shorebirds are roosting at high tide – need to get more data – is a big missing piece of information.

Presentation 3: North Atlantic Right Whales and Fixed Gear Fisheries

- One of the most endangered whales in the world. Extend from Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of St Lawrence in Canada
- Had an increase in population from mid 1990s to 2010 and now are seeing a decline – shifting food sources, shifting migratory patterns – they are under many significant threats.
- 2010-14 – 82% of deaths resulted from entanglement.
- Marine mammal protection act and the endangered species act offer some regulatory protection.
- Tek Reduction Team established by NOAA in 1996: 60 person body made up of state agency and other staff. Meant to reach consensus and they work to revise the right whale implementation plan.
- In 2017 had 18 dead right whales which was highly unusual. The management target is less than one right whale per year. Entanglement was the major issue here.
- Goal is to reduce the risk of entanglement by 60%

- Be weakening rope used by fishermen, whales could break free more easily; decrease the number of vertical lines.
- Need more data on the whales and their migratory patterns.
- Online and phone survey of fishermen – how and where they are fishing, number of traps per trawl, etc. Results – rope diameter increases with distance from shore;
- Collecting vertical line samples from fishermen to estimate breaking strength
- All whales are affected, but the focus is currently on the right whale because of huge drop in numbers and they under the greatest threat.
- Fishermen recognize that something needs to be done – in the survey they were told that this information can assist in developing better regulations instead randomly having regulations slapped on.