



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) -- Interior least terns and piping plovers, two species of small birds that are protected by the Endangered Species Act, will soon begin nesting on the beaches of Lake McConaughy.

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, owner and operator of Nebraska's largest reservoir, is asking visitors to the lake to help protect the birds, their nests and their chicks by "Sharing the Shoreline."

The birds' nests are shallow scrapes in the sand which are often difficult to see. Central locates and clearly marks as many nesting sites as possible, but regardless of whether or not the sites are marked, disturbance of a protected species is a violation of state and federal laws and violators are subject to significant penalties. The best action to take upon encountering the birds or their nests is to avoid them completely! Visitors to the lake are also reminded to comply with regulations requiring pets to be kept on leashes.

"Optimum conditions for tern and plover nesting come and go and it's too early to predict what kind of nesting population we'll have this year," said Mark Peyton, Central's senior biologist. "Production of terns and plovers in Nebraska varies considerably from year to year depending upon the location. This is a natural occurrence because of the often unforgiving nature of Nebraska's weather -- floods, heat, wind, hail -- as well as the impact of predators and people. But despite the many dangers facing the birds, their future is brighter."

Peyton said that continued research, habitat protection and restoration (as Central has done at Lake McConaughy and sites along the Platte River), and work being done by other utilities and private conservation groups has resulted in progress toward securing the birds' future.

Central has hired additional temporary employees to help monitor and protect the birds and their nests this summer, and other state and federal agencies will assist with the efforts, particularly on holiday weekends.

"The task of protecting these species is easier when the public is aware of the birds' presence," Peyton said. "The public has been very cooperative in the past and we certainly want to avoid situations that might result in restrictions to beach access at Lake McConaughy."

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