

was designated as endangered by Canada in 1987, a status that was confirmed in 2000 (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada 2000).

A Memorandum of Understanding between Canada, Mexico, and the United States was established to enhance coordination and partnerships regarding conservation of wildlife, plants, biological diversity, and ecosystems of mutual interest. The Memorandum of Understanding established the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management to develop and implement cooperative conservation projects within the three countries. This Committee has evaluated opportunities for shared conservation efforts on many species, including the mountain plover.

State Regulations

The mountain plover is now classified as threatened in Nebraska, a "species of special interest or concern" in California, Montana, and Oklahoma, a "species in need of conservation" in Kansas, and a "high priority species of concern" in New Mexico (Flath 1984; Sager 1996; E. Hunt, California Department of Fish and Game, in litt. 1990; Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 1992; Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation 1992; Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks 1992). States other than those identified above have not given the mountain plover any special designation. State listing can encourage State agencies to use existing authorities to conserve species and habitats, stimulate research, and allow redirection of priorities within State natural resource departments.

State agencies within the range of the mountain plover have recently completed "A Multi-State Conservation Strategy for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog in the U.S." (Luce 2003) to pursue conservation of the black-tailed prairie dog through regulations or provision of incentives to landowners for maintaining prairie dog colonies. The sale of rodenticide within the mountain plover's breeding range has increased in recent years and prairie dog shooting also is popular throughout the range of the mountain plover. No State regulations limit prairie dog poisoning, but prairie dog shooting is regulated in some areas. Colorado has banned prairie dog sport shooting on all public lands and under most circumstances on private lands; Montana has adopted a seasonal closure of prairie dog shooting on public lands, and there are no restrictions on shooting prairie dogs in Wyoming, except on the Thunder Basin

National Grassland where shooting is banned.

The State of Colorado, in which a majority of the species' breeding range occurs, has initiated a program to conserve the mountain plover and its habitat, by reducing their vulnerability while they occupy cultivated lands, educating the public, and conserving grasslands that are known or potential breeding habitat (T. Blickensderfer, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, in litt. 2003). In 2003, the CDOW spent \$263,000 to conduct research and monitoring on public and private lands occupied by mountain plovers, create an educational video, and implement a "1-877-4PLOVER" number to help reduce the "take" of mountain plovers on cultivated lands in Colorado and contiguous States. The CDOW also has created the Colorado Species Conservation Partnership program. The purpose of the program is to implement conservation actions on private and public lands throughout Colorado to ensure that the status of declining and at-risk species is improved to a level that will prevent their listing under the Act. The CDOW is pursuing mountain plover conservation under this program by recommending that \$2 million be dedicated to long-term conservation agreements on private lands that may be occupied by mountain plovers. The initial sign-up for this effort resulted in applications for conservation easements for over 60,704 ha (150,000 ac) of private shortgrass prairie in eastern Colorado that would cost \$14,600,000. The CDOW is pursuing partnerships to implement these conservation easements, and is optimistic that more funding will be provided in future years (R. George, in litt. 2003).

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission working with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory has initiated a similar landowner incentive program called the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership (Holliday 2003) and funded in 2003 for over \$500,000. It is in the first stages of implementation. While both the Colorado and Nebraska programs are voluntary habitat conservation programs, both wildlife agencies have the authority to initiate, fund, and implement them. These conservation efforts are new but have shown some initial successes and are likely to provide a significant level of protection for the mountain plover, especially in eastern Colorado.

In California, the species is listed as a species of special concern. In the following discussion, we describe the regulatory mechanisms in California on a county-level basis.

Three counties in California are drafting Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) with the Service to protect listed and declining species, including the mountain plover. With the development of the Western Riverside County Multiple Species HCP (MSHCP), the County of Riverside and other jurisdictions within Riverside County and California have requested an incidental take permit under section 10(a)(1)(B) under the Act for up to 164 covered species, including the mountain plover. The permit is needed to authorize take of listed species during urban and rural development, and agricultural activities in the approximately 509,904-ha (1.26 million-ac) study area in western Riverside County. The county and other jurisdictions propose in their conservation strategy to conserve, monitor, and manage 85 percent of the potential plover wintering habitat (*i.e.*, 2,715 of 3,185 ha (6,710 of 7,870 ac)) in the county. The Service is now assessing the effect of the MSHCP and the associated incidental take permit on the mountain plover and other species proposed for coverage.

Similarly, a San Joaquin County HCP finalized in November 2000 targets the protection of over 40,469 ha (100,000 ac) of habitat for 92 species, including the mountain plover, following adoption of enabling ordinances and/or resolutions by local agencies. A similar HCP for Solano County, which includes protection of potential mountain plover habitat, is being drafted, but is not yet finalized.

In summary, Federal, State, and county agencies and governments have taken significant proactive steps, in the absence of listing, and have shown progress in the conservation of mountain plovers and their habitat.

Factor E. Other Natural or Manmade Factors Affecting Its Continued Existence

Natural Factors

Because mountain plovers congregate in large flocks on the wintering grounds, they may be more vulnerable to local catastrophic events there. For example, winter surveys in the Imperial Valley in February 2003 were cut short when heavy rains fell and the flocks of mountain plovers disappeared. It is speculated that the birds left their wintering grounds early or moved to less suitable habitats in the Central Valley (F. Knopf, in litt., 2003). The former appears more likely since the CBC for the area (Salton Sea South) had a record low number of plovers, while the Panoche Valley count to the north