

News Release

Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manages Sandy Point Island for Wildlife and Habitat

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Sandy Point Island, located in Stonington, CT and Westerly, RI, is managed as a National Wildlife Refuge by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) through a lease with Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. The deed for the Island includes an obligation that the land be “used as a nature preserve”, with permission to allow public recreation “as long as said use does not substantially adversely affect the condition of the premises as a nature preserve.” Therefore, the Service’s primary purpose on Sandy Point Island is the management of wildlife and their habitat, while also balancing passive public recreation that does not cause disturbance to natural resources.

Sandy Point Island provides important nesting habitat for Piping Plovers, a federally threatened shorebird protected under the Endangered Species Act. Currently, there are several additional species of birds that nest on the island, including American Oystercatcher, Least Tern, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Great Black-backed Gull, and Herring Gull, all of which have protections under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Additionally, Sandy Point Island is home to the largest nesting population of American Oystercatchers in Rhode Island with 15-17 pairs in recent years, further underscoring the site’s importance to wildlife. Loud noises and large crowds such as those from fireworks and on or near-shore concerts can cause disturbance to the nesting birds and chicks, which is prohibited by law. In general, fireworks and concerts need to be at least 0.5 miles away from nesting areas.

Shorebirds arrive to the island in March and April and the Service temporarily closes areas that are suitable nesting habitat to protect nests and eggs from trampling. Laying eggs and raising chicks occurs between April and August. By the end of August, most of the young can fly and begin their migration south for the winter months. The beaches at Sandy Point Island also provide important stopover habitat for lots of different waterbirds on their way south from more northern areas. Birds like sandpipers, turnstones, terns, and multiple plover species stop along their journey to fuel up on invertebrates along the shores, including the federally listed Roseate Tern and Red Knot.

People and shorebirds can coexist and share the same beaches, it just takes a little care and patience. The Service works to manage the island so people can recreate in a wildlife-friendly manner and birds can successfully nest. However, certain activities, like concerts, loud music, fireworks, dogs/pets, large crowds, and drones are harmful to nesting birds and are not allowed. If we give birds space by respecting closed areas, take all trash off the island, leave all pets at home, do not camp or have open fires, and prevent loud noises like fireworks and concerts, then

the birds can successfully raise their young while visitors also enjoy Sandy Point Island. Activities like beach-going, walking, exploring the shore, and birdwatching are all great ways to enjoy the island in a wildlife-friendly manner.

You can be a part of the successful nesting season by purchasing the required beach pass at rhodeislandpermits.recaccess.com. The pass is used as an outreach tool to inform users of the rules and regulations while visiting the island, and the fee collected helps support outreach and management of the area. Please report violations to the FWS Tips line at 1-844-397-8477, or the refuge at 401-364-9124. If you are interested in joining our team as a volunteer, please email us at RhodeIslandComplex@fws.gov.

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.