

Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area (SRA) is one of the state's premier destinations and will provide great water and extensive white sandy beaches this summer, but visitors are asked to be mindful of interior least terns and piping plovers who share the lake's sandy shoreline.

"These protected birds struggle to nest and raise their young in the face of predators and extreme weather while here," Lake McConaughy SRA superintendent Colby Johnson said.

"Park visitors can help protect the birds and ensure that we can strike the right balance between human recreation and endangered species conservation."

Visitors are asked to follow these steps:

- Do not enter marked or fenced-off nesting areas.
- Obey all signs.
- Keep all pets on leashes.

Interior least terns and piping plovers are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act and the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Act. Persons killing, harming, disturbing or harassing these birds, or allowing their pets to do so, can be prosecuted under the law.

Maximum penalties are up to a \$100,000 fine and up to one year in jail or both.

"The recreational opportunities we will be able to provide at Lake McConaughy will be linked to our collective capacity to avoid conflicts between birds and recreation," Johnson said.

Piping plovers and interior least terns nest together on expanses of bare or sparsely vegetated sand near water. Nests blend in perfectly; the eggs appear not much more than small rocks and both species' tiny chicks are similarly camouflaged and vulnerable, a problem when prime nesting habitat also is attractive to people for recreation.

Lake McConaughy is one of the state's most important nesting areas for piping plovers. The number of nesting pairs is variable, ranging from a couple dozen to a couple hundred, depending on available habitat. Only a small number of interior least terns nest annually at Lake McConaughy.

The nesting season for both species extends from mid-April to mid-August. Efforts to protect the birds are led by the lake's owner, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

Lake McConaughy SRA is a popular Nebraska recreation destination for beach-goers, campers, anglers and boaters. The park was visited by more than a million people last year.