

and unsafe practices. They've also continued to educate NPS rangers, explaining the kiteflying rules to officers who over-zealously tried to enforce a now-nonexistent kiting ban.

The Chicagoland Skyliners once shared their flying field at suburban Busse Woods with a rugby league. Kiteers using the park befriended the park rangers, followed park rules, and acted politely toward other park users. For their Sky Circus festival, the club made sure to reserve the field and picnic shelter. When the rugby players tried to claim that they had the right to use the field that day, the Skyliners were quickly able to bring the problem to the attention of a ranger, who upheld the club's reservation of the field and kicked the rugby match out for the day.

There's a lot to be said for making friends with the folks in charge. I've worked in the parks and recreation profession for more than twenty years, half of that with various government agencies, and I know for a fact that my coworkers and I played favorites. We were always more likely to act favorably towards people we knew in a positive way. A club that helped clean up litter in the park, or made an annual donation to the Friends of the Park, or assisted us with purchasing a piece of equipment, was always going to get preferential treatment when it came to reserving a picnic shelter, getting a bonfire permit, or having a ranger block off parking spaces for their cars. Does your kite club help maintain the place where you fly? Or are you just another bunch of taxpaying citizens complaining that the lawn isn't mowed and the bathrooms need cleaning?

Earlier this year, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department took steps to institute new rules which would have been detrimental to kiting. The rules would have potentially banned anchoring kites, required permits and fees for group get-togethers, and even banned kites from some popular beaches. Kiteers immediately protested, inundating the state agency and lawmakers with calls, letters, and e-mails. In a series of public meetings, David Gomberg, Amy Doran and others were able to explain their position to rulemakers. Ultimately, the new rules were altered in favor of kitefliers, but that doesn't mean the battle is over. Government agencies in search of revenues will continue to look at ways to charge park users new user fees, and insurance agencies with no understanding of kiteflying will continue to insist that agencies enact "safety" rules or risk losing their coverage.

But what about the plovers? Should we really be arguing in favor of something that harms a cuddly critter that's nearing extinction? As a kiteflier and a conservationist, I struggle with that question, and have decided that my answer is, "No, but...." Management decisions like opening or closing public lands should be based on science. In the case of plovers, the science is wrapped up in an unpublished 1993 master's thesis written by Edwin Mark Hoopes, entitled *The Relationship Between Human Recreation and Piping Plover Foraging Ecology and Chick Survival*. My research shows that this lone document is cited over and over by wildlife managers, and provides the basis for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management plan for several beach nesting birds. But I also found that few biologists have ever read it, although they consider it the gospel. It took me more than three months to obtain a copy from the University of Massachusetts library, and even then they wouldn't loan it to me, but only to a college professor friend of mine. (As a public service, a PDF of the 118-page document is now available on the KITING+ page of the AKA website.)

Hoopes studied six beaches in Massachusetts where plovers nested, with varying amounts of access by pedestrians, dogs, kitefliers, and off-road vehicles (ORVs). He found that plovers



were most tolerant of disturbances by pedestrians, and least tolerant of dogs, kites, and ORVs. Disturbed plovers may leave their nests unprotected, or be prevented from feeding. Plovers reacted to kites at a greater distance than other disturbances — they may perceive kites to be birds of prey or some other aerial predator — and kites seem to cause plovers to move the greatest distance. At first read, kites seem to be a problem.

But look at the data closer. Hoopes found that less than 7% of plover chick deaths could be attributed to human disturbance; most deaths were probably from natural causes like exposure and predators. Hoopes singles out ORVs as a serious problem, including one instance where an ORV ran over a plover nest.

That raises the question of why a beach would be closed to kites but not ORVs. The answer, I think, is not scientific, but political. The ORVs are often driven by fishermen, who are well organized politically. Hold a public meeting where a city council proposes to limit fishermen's access to fishing, and the room will likely be filled with angry citizens who arrived in trucks with I FISH AND I VOTE stickers on the bumpers. Can kitefliers say the same? The political consequences of closing a beach to joggers and fishermen are huge; the consequences of limiting access to kiteflying simply don't exist. Decisions go in favor of those who show up. ☒

