

Feral Cat Caretakers Reject Order to Remove Feeding Stations

US Fish and Wildlife issued order to protect piping plover birds.

The board of the Seacoast Area Feline Education and Rescue (SAFER) Inc., decided not to follow an order from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove feeding stations for feral cats at New Hampshire beaches.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued the directive to protect a group of piping plover bird eggs on New Hampshire's Seabrook and Hampton beaches.

After the birds hatch in early July, the young birds will be unable to fly for a month. Their only defense against skunks, cats, gulls and other predators will be to hunker down in the sand.

In a March 10 letter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ordered SAFER to get rid of cat-feeding stations within five miles of the beach or face liability for breaking the Endangered Species Act. However, SAFER has rejected the order.

According to SAFER president Carol Ritchie, her organization isn't breaking the law and there's no proof the cats will affect the plover.

There are two nesting pairs of piping plovers—one on Seabrook beach and one on Hampton beach, both with four eggs. The eggs on Seabrook Beach are scheduled to hatch July 4; on Hampton Beach, the due date is a week later.

Instead of moving its feeding stations, SAFER plans to increase its watchfulness to trap new, abandoned animals, according to Ritchie.

Fifty to 75 cats a year are abandoned at the beach, SAFER estimates. Ritchie said there are 200 feral cats living at Hampton and Seabrook Beaches.

SAFER traps the feral and abandoned cats, spays and neuters them and then has them inoculated. The domesticated cats are housed until they are adopted. SAFER has a no-kill policy. Posted: June 27, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST