

Boat Wakes Could Jeopardize Endangered Birds in Ocean City

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By Lauren Holloway - WBOC



OCEAN CITY, Md.- Excessive boat wake could threaten Black Skimmer's habitat on 'OC Spoils' Island by the route 50 bridge.

The Maryland Coastal Bays Program is asking all boat owners to keep their vessels at a no wake speed between the red triangle number 2 channel marker to the “6 knot” marker near the route 50 bridge, in order to protect the only location of nesting Black Skimmer's in the state of Maryland which are in jeopardy of being destroyed by boat wakes.

A small, unnamed island unofficially referred to as the 'OC Spoils', is home to the only known nesting area for the endangered Black Skimmer. This island is also home to a few common tern nests, a bird that is also being monitored due to diminishing habitats.

The reduction of boat wakes will benefit both species that are of significant conservation interest.

The island's location just west of the Ocean City navigation channel with relatively deep water and no sand shoals between it can contribute nest and chick loss to wakes from large boats traveling above 6 knots.

Some of the bird nests are relatively low on the beach where the combination of high tide level, especially tides around the new and full moons and large boat wakes result in nest and chick loss.

Common Tern and Black Skimmer populations have declined dramatically in Maryland since 1985. Black Skimmers are currently listed as Endangered in Maryland and Common Terns are currently proposed for a change in status to Endangered as soon as the necessary regulatory process is completed.

Both Black Skimmers and Common Terns prefer to nest on relatively open sand beaches, particularly Black Skimmers.

In the coastal bays of Worcester County there were only two breeding colonies located during surveys in mid-June and they contained a total of 10 breeding pairs. A revisit to both colony sites found that the larger colony had totally abandoned its breeding attempt and the only remaining active colony consisted of 4 pairs located on this small island near the navigation channel.

MCBP is working to lower the speed limit in that area; however, it could take up to a year. In the meantime, MCBP Science Coordinator, Roman Jesien, in conjunction with Department of Natural Resources, have put up no wake signs on the island and have monitored it daily.