

ESSENTIAL HABITAT: *ROSEATE TERN* NESTING AREAS

WHY DOES THE ROSEATE TERN NEED THIS LEVEL OF PROTECTION?

Roseate terns are small, graceful seabirds that return each spring to nest and raise their young on a few traditionally used islands along the eastern coast of North America. Although exact historic figures are unknown, it is likely that several hundred pairs once nested in Maine. During the late 1800s, however, roseate tern numbers declined drastically as human-related habitat degradation and unrestricted shooting nearly eliminated the species throughout its range.



Around the turn of the century, state and federal laws were passed to prohibit indiscriminate killing of terns and other migratory birds. At the same time, human influences on coastal islands were decreasing. As a result, roseate tern numbers increased. By the early 1930s, Maine's population had grown to about 275 pairs. Unfortunately, this recovery was not to last. Renewed pressures from habitat loss and human disturbance, combined with predation and competition from a growing gull population, initiated a second decline. By 1987, as few as 52 pairs of roseate terns nested in Maine.

In 1986, the roseate tern was listed as an endangered species under both the United States and Maine Endangered Species Acts. As a result of intensive management efforts, Maine's population has grown to approximately 290 pairs. Roseate terns in Maine nest on just a small handful of islands. After more than 100 years of record-keeping, they have been found on only 22 of the more than 3,500 islands off our coast. These few islands, providing the unique combination of features necessary for successful nesting, are essential to the restoration of roseate terns in Maine. Disturbances or land use changes at these traditional sites can cause nesting failure and consequently prevent the overall population from maintaining its numbers or increasing to recovery levels. For this reason, they are the focus of Essential Habitat designation for roseate terns.

IS THE SEASONAL TIMING OF PROJECTS A MAJOR CONCERN?

Yes! Roseate terns are very sensitive to disturbance during their nesting season. Generally, this is between **May 15 and August 31** but may vary slightly from year to year. Seasonal timing of activities will often be a determining factor in project reviews and should always be addressed in a project's design before seeking final MDIFW evaluation. **Contact an MDIFW Regional Wildlife Biologist for assistance in determining seasonal timing concerns.** Examples of projects often acceptable outside the critical nesting season are:

- expansion, alteration, or repair of existing structures
- construction, **if** all other review standards are met

ONCE AN AREA IS DESIGNATED AS ESSENTIAL HABITAT, WILL IT ALWAYS BE SO?

No. The Law allows Essential Habitat designation only for species on Maine's Endangered And Threatened Species List. Designating roseate tern nesting islands as Essential Habitat will allow Maine's roseate tern population to grow. If the species recovers to the point where it is no longer endangered or threatened, all Essential Habitat designations for roseate terns will be eliminated. Also, if an individual nesting area were no longer considered essential to achieving recovery goals for roseate terns, Essential Habitat designation would be removed.