



# EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

**September 2017**

*The Eastern Crane E-bulletin is distributed to those interested in cranes in general, and specifically, the Eastern Populations of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes, as well as the continuing work for the protection of these birds and their habitats.*

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**Editor's note:** *Shootings and powerline strikes are the main contributors to Whooping Crane mortality. In the last five years, 13 crane deaths in the Eastern Migratory Population alone have been attributed to shootings – acts of vandalism. Each death, whether in the wild Aransas Wood-Buffalo population or in the reintroduced eastern populations, is a blow to the survival of this endangered species. Groups working to protect the cranes hope that public education will increase the number of individuals and communities invested in “their” cranes and by doing so help safeguard this iconic species. The recent convictions of shooters in Texas and Louisiana are small steps in that direction – sending the message that shooting a Whooping Crane is a serious offense and that the shooter faces incarceration, fines and other penalties.*

## **Prison time for Texas Whooping Crane shooter**

In a July 14, 2017 press release by the U.S. State Attorney's office, Acting U.S. Attorney Brit Featherston announced that 20-year-old Trey Joseph Frederick of Beaumont, Texas was sentenced to federal prison for violating the terms of his probation in the Eastern District of Texas.

The Whooping Crane is a species of migratory bird in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and is therefore covered by the Endangered Species Act. It is unlawful to capture, kill, trap, or collect Whooping Cranes, or attempt to engage in such conduct in the United States.

In October 2016 Frederick was sentenced to five years of federal probation after pleading guilty to a violation of the Endangered Species Act for the January 2016 shooting deaths of two Whooping Cranes belonging to the reintroduced flock in [Louisiana](#).

Frederick was back in federal court facing charges that he violated the terms of his probation for, among other things, using a semiautomatic rifle to hunt from a roadway in Jefferson County, Texas. The terms of Frederick's probation specifically prohibited his owning or possessing firearms, ammunition or any other dangerous weapon. Frederick is also prohibited from hunting or fishing anywhere in the United States. During his court appearance, U. S. Magistrate Judge Zack Hawthorn sentenced Frederick to 11 months incarceration to be followed by a one-year term of supervised release.

Judge Hawthorn waived the 200 hours of community service of the 2016 sentence, so that upon his release, Frederick will spend all of his time working to obtain the money to pay the original restitution of \$12,907.50 each to the [International Crane Foundation](#) and to the [Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation](#).

Acting U.S. Attorney Featherston made the following statement, “Trey Frederick was given the opportunity of probation when he was first convicted of killing two federally protected Whooping Cranes. Apparently, Mr. Frederick did not appreciate the leniency he was given, and today, he learned the consequences. Mr. Frederick will now have 11 months to contemplate his actions.”

Tim Grunewald, the Crane Foundation's North American Program director, said the judge's ruling is justified. "We want people in society to know this is a serious offense," Grunewald said. "Now it's up to this young man to decide what he wants to do with his life."

It seems to be the consensus among the hunting community that the sentence serves to distinguish poaching and random killings from legal hunting.

## **Gueydan, Louisiana man pleads guilty to illegal shooting of Whooping Crane**

In November 2014, a Whooping Crane with a gunshot wound to its left leg was found near Gueydan, Louisiana. The crane was transported to the Louisiana State University Veterinary School, where it had to be euthanized because of the injury. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents investigated the shooting.

In July 2017, Lane T. Thibodeaux, 21 of Gueydan pled guilty in the Lafayette Federal Court to migratory bird violations that occurred in Vermilion Parish. The violations included: taking a Whooping Crane, taking migratory game bird outside of a designated season, hunting from a vehicle on a public road, not possessing a Louisiana hunting license, and wanton waste of migratory game birds. Agents also arrested Thibodeaux in March 2015 on felony witness-intimidation charges. These charges were still pending at the time of the press release.

Judge Carol B. Whitehurst of the Western District Court accepted his guilty plea and sentenced Thibodeaux to serve 45 days in Federal Prison for each of the five convictions to run concurrently and a \$2,500 fine. He must pay his fine in full within one year, or he will have to serve 45 days in Federal Prison for each of the five convictions to run consecutively.

To read the entire July 11, 2017 LDWF press release, go here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/41328>

**Report Whooping Crane violations and all illegal activity to the LDWF law enforcement office at 800-442-2511.**

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## **Eastern Migratory Population of WHOOPERS**

### **What is the International Crane Foundation's stand on hunting Sandhill Cranes?**

Currently there is no hunting season for Sandhill Cranes in Wisconsin and it is a contentiously debated topic by groups with diverse views.

"ICF engages in research and activities that serve to protect cranes, people and the habitats they share. The organization generates data from quantitative research that are helping develop solutions to issues like crop damage, but this data cannot inform arguments about whether hunting cranes is right or wrong, an important ethical but non-scientific debate. Furthermore, one of ICF's core goals is to establish alliances among groups committed to conservation, many of which include hunters, farmers and other groups. Historically, hunting groups have made significant contributions to conservation efforts. As a source of scientific expertise and data ICF can host discussions among a variety of parties whose disparate political agendas and opinions regarding conservation prevent them from collaborating in other social and political settings.

"ICF believes it is most effective when everyone including hunters, farmers and other landowners work together to conserve the privately-owned wetlands that our cranes depend upon for survival. We also believe any discussions about hunting should be based on the best scientific information available.... In order to assure accurate public discussion on the topic it is important for the public to know the following three points related to a Sandhill Crane hunt in Wisconsin.

1. If not very carefully managed, Sandhill Crane hunting can harm populations.
2. Hunting is not a solution for Sandhill Crane crop damage. The International Crane Foundation is actively involved in solving this problem.
3. Accidental shooting of Whooping Cranes is a threat to their successful reintroduction into Wisconsin and the eastern U.S.”

For more information go to: <https://www.savingcranes.org/a-sandhill-crane-hunt-in-wisconsin/> and here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/our-work/north-america/>

## Whooping Crane Ambassadors

The [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#) believes endangered Whooping Cranes benefit from actions taken by informed citizens and local communities who are proud that Whooping Cranes are in their midst, and who actively work to protect cranes and their habitats.

In recent years Indiana ([Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area](#), Greene County IN) and Alabama ([Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Decatur, AL) have hosted growing numbers of wintering Whooping Cranes from the eastern migratory population. Based on this, over a dozen colleagues from Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee were invited to attend a Whooping Crane outreach and education workshop from August 3-5, 2017 at the International Crane Foundation headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Organized by the International Crane Foundation Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator, Lizzie Condon, participants learned about ICF’s work both at home and internationally; heard updates of the status and trends of the Eastern Migratory Population of Sandhill Cranes; took part in media training; interpreted to visitors at the annual ICF Cranes of the World Festival; and visited both the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and the Aldo Leopold Foundation. Through the workshop the “Whooping Crane Ambassadors” gained skills to support Whooping Crane outreach activities in their respective states as well as a better understanding of the importance of partnerships in Whooping Crane conservation.

## Whooping Cranes now visible on the landscape, even in eastern Kentucky

For more than 40 years, many organizations and agencies have been working to bring back the Whooping Crane. Today, their presence and bugling call are slowly re-emerging on the landscape – including eastern Kentucky.

In early 2016, the USFWS directed the *Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP)*, of which the International Crane Foundation is a founding member, to begin a program known as “Parent-reared” (PR) where captive-born chicks are raised by their own parents in a captive-breeding facility with minimal human contact. Later the colts are released and learn to migrate by following wild cranes that serve as adoptive parents (“*allopayers*”). Each juvenile bird is banded to allow the International Crane Foundation to monitor the crane’s progress and development in the wild.

In fall 2016, the International Crane Foundation released 12 Parent-reared young cranes in Wisconsin near adult Whooping Cranes of the reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population (EMP). Ideally, the association with the adult cranes will integrate the young cranes into the flock, where they will learn to migrate south for the winter and then return in the spring with the EMP wild flock to summer in Wisconsin.

But, as is often seen with juveniles and post-breeding adults, cranes may wander. One of the juveniles released last fall, [Whooping Crane 70-16, or “Bryce”](#), spent last winter with other Whooping Cranes at [Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#) in northern Alabama. Tracking and visual confirmation indicate the young crane then spent much of the summer in eastern Kentucky. Now the question is, will “Bryce” migrate back to Wheeler NWR this winter on his own?

To read about Parent-reared chicks hatched and raised at the ICF headquarters, go here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/parent-reared-whooping-cranes-starting-their-first-migration/>

## Building Whooping Crane Awareness One State at a Time

The survival of Whooping Cranes depends on the actions of people – people protecting the ecosystems where Whooping Cranes live and people living in harmony with the birds. Over the past five years, thirteen Whooping Crane shootings have been documented. Shootings currently account for 19% of known adult mortality in the reintroduced population of Whooping Cranes in the eastern United States. A few of the cranes were killed because they were mistaken for legally-hunted species. But most appear to have been killed in acts of vandalism. Whooping Cranes in the wild still number fewer than 500, and the population grows slowly. Therefore, any mortalities, particularly of adult breeding birds, can pose a significant threat to the long-term survival of the species.

In the fall of 2015, the International Crane Foundation (ICF) launched a Whooping Crane outreach campaign in Alabama. The goal of the program is to raise awareness of the presence of Whooping Cranes in the state and to reduce threats such as wetland loss, shootings, and powerline collisions.

ICF's awareness campaigns in Alabama and Wisconsin include K-12 education, citizen science, television and radio public service announcements, billboards, social and traditional media campaigns, presence at gun and hunting shows, hunter education, and appearances at Whooping Crane festivals. The ICF will continue to promote increased awareness of Whooping Cranes in Alabama and is in the process of launching a new campaign in Indiana this year.

## Eastern Migratory Population Update

The current population of the eastern migratory population of Whooping Cranes is 96 (42 females, 50 males, 4 unknown). This includes the two fledged 2017 wild-hatched chicks (unknown sex). As of September 1, at least 83 Whooping Cranes were confirmed in Wisconsin, 1 in Iowa, 2 in North Dakota, 1 in Michigan, and 1 in Kentucky. The remaining birds' locations have not been reported during August.

The staff of Operation Migration, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural Resources, the International Crane Foundation, and the volunteers who keep track of the cranes throughout the year contribute to the recovery of the Whooping Crane eastern migratory population.

*For more information about the 2017 wild-hatched colts, the Parent-reared 2016 cohort, mortality and a map showing locations of the birds, go here:*

<http://operationmigration.org/InTheField/2017/09/01/emp-update-7/>

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## Aransas-Wood Buffalo WHOOPERS

### **Hurricane Harvey devastates International Crane Foundation Texas program**

*From a post by the International Crane Foundation on Monday August 28, 2017:*

“During this challenging time, our hearts go out to the people of coastal Texas and all areas affected by Hurricane Harvey. We also are deeply saddened by the devastating flooding that continues to impact Houston and surrounding areas. We at the International Crane Foundation have staff and offices in Rockport and other Texas Gulf coastal areas that suffered a direct hit by the Category 4 hurricane this past weekend.

We are thankful our staff are safe. Our office, unfortunately, was destroyed. As members of the Rockport and broader Texas Gulf coastal community, we are committed to ensuring that our Texas program continues to support the people, landscape and wildlife of the area, especially the endangered Whooping Cranes.”

*The International Crane Foundation has established a donation site specifically to help with cleanup and site renovation in this hard-hit area.*

*[You can help by donating today. Click here for more information.](#)*

## **Record 63 Whooping Crane chicks fledged on Wood Buffalo breeding grounds**

Aransas-Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) Whooping Crane nest surveys are a joint effort by [Environment and Climate Change Canada \(ECCC\)](#), [Canadian Wildlife Service \(CWS\)](#), [Parks Canada](#), the [Government of the Northwest Territories](#) and as a partner, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017 marks the 51<sup>st</sup> year for the annual surveys.

Parks Canada and CWS detected a record 98 Whooping Crane nests during the May 18 – 21, 2017 survey. This was a substantial increase over the 2014 record of 82 nests.

In late July, WBNP and CWS staff conducted aerial surveys over sites where nests were detected in May, and counted 63 chicks – including 4 sets of twins! The previous high record count was 49 chicks in 2006.

According to the group, [Friends of the Wild Whoopers](#), the marked increase in nests and fledglings from previous years is a result of several key factors:

- Habitat conditions this season on the Wood Buffalo nesting grounds were excellent, with most wetland basins full, providing suitable nesting sites for the cranes.
- Ongoing monitoring of the nesting areas by the Wood Buffalo staff along with legal protection by wildlife law enforcement personnel for approximately seven decades has proved invaluable.
- And, the increase could be attributed to the fact that Whooping Cranes fledged between 2010-2013 have now reached breeding age.

All survey results are preliminary until analysis of data obtained during the nesting and fledgling surveys is completed by [CWS](#) in fall 2017.

*Read more about the fledglings here:*

*<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/record-whooping-crane-chicks-fledged-wood-buffalo/>*

## **Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate lakes in wild Whooping Crane migration corridor**

The Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to enter into a joint venture with [Friends of the Wild Whoopers](#) (FOTWW) to do habitat assessments of the land and lakes under the Army Corps' jurisdiction. This project will be similar to assessments already completed by FOTWW at 32 military facilities and 8 Indian Reservations within the wild Whooping Cranes' 7-state migration corridor. Some of the sites already had suitable wetland habitats, while others could be made attractive to Whooping Cranes with only minor modifications.

The first step is for the Army Corps and FOTWW to determine whether any suitable areas can be managed, or appropriately developed, to provide "stopover" habitat for Whooping Cranes. The next step is to work to encourage appropriate management. Friends of the Wild Whoopers is aware that some Corps lakes are currently used by Whoopers and the group would like that to see that continue and increase.

Adverse effects of global warming are evident on many of the small ponds and shallow wetlands used by the cranes to rest and feed during their annual spring and fall migrations. Chester McConnell, President of FOTWW, has personally observed areas where hundreds of small ponds dry up by late September. This makes partnerships with groups such as the Army Corps of Engineers, the military bases and First Nations increasingly crucial for the conservation of Whooping Crane stopover habitat.

*To read more about the work of the Friends of the Wild Whoopers or to learn how to support their important work, go here: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/>*

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## Endangered Species Act: An American conservation movement takes flight

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was founded in 1973 because Congress recognized that America's natural heritage was of "esthetic, ecological, educational, recreational, and scientific value to our Nation and its people."

In 1970, even before the Endangered Species Act (ESA) became law, the Whooping Crane was one of the first species listed as endangered. The species' struggle is characteristic of many endangered species – unregulated hunting, habitat loss, low reproductive output and a dangerous migration route, all pushed the species to near-extinction. The USFWS described the Whooping Crane as a "flagship species for the North American wildlife conservation movement," as it engaged several states and multiple stakeholders in pioneering recovery efforts throughout the bird's migratory range.

The Whooping Crane is still an endangered species, and the ESA continues to play a crucial role by offering the technical and legal framework to make the various conservation efforts possible – helping to safeguard the species, for the moment, from certain extinction.

Read more from the [Environmental Defense Fund](http://blogs.edf.org/growingreturns/2017/07/25/15-birds-an-american-conservation-movement/) here:

<http://blogs.edf.org/growingreturns/2017/07/25/15-birds-an-american-conservation-movement/>

## Flawed McKittrick Policy ruled unlawful

On June 21, 2017, there was cause for celebration among conservation groups when federal Judge David Bury threw out the Department of Justice's flawed McKittrick Policy. The U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona found the McKittrick Policy "outside the range of prosecutorial authority" given to DOJ under the Endangered Species Act.

Under the policy the government had prosecuted those responsible for killing animals on the Endangered Species Act's (ESA) list of imperiled species only when it could prove the killer knew the exact biological identity of the species s/he was harming. Because of the defective policy, the government had declined to prosecute people who killed protected species, including critically endangered Mexican wolves, gray wolves (like 'Echo' the Grand Canyon wolf who was shot by a coyote hunter), Whooping Cranes, California Condors, and Grizzly Bears.

The decision resulted from a challenge in 2013 brought by [WildEarth Guardians](http://www.wildearthguardians.org/) and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. "Wildlife killers who are either profoundly careless or worse, who intentionally target protected animals, no longer have a get-out-of-jail-free card by claiming they did not know the identity of the animals they kill," said Bethany Cotton, wildlife program director for WildEarth Guardians.

To read and/or download the court ruling, click [here](http://www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Guardians_etal_v_USJustice_Dept_McKittrickSJorder.pdf). Or, here:

[http://www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Guardians\\_etal\\_v\\_USJustice\\_Dept\\_McKittrickSJorder.pdf](http://www.wildearthguardians.org/site/DocServer/Guardians_etal_v_USJustice_Dept_McKittrickSJorder.pdf)

Read more about the new ruling here:

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/court-throws-out-policy-whether-or-not-to-prosecute-killers-endangered-species/>

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## Colorado:

### **“Crops for Cranes”**

Concerned that the Rocky Mountain Greater Sandhill Cranes, a migratory population, designated in the 1970s as “endangered” and still listed by the State of Colorado as a “species of concern,” would decline in numbers and disappear from the area, birdwatchers, nature-lovers, and other interested citizens of Northwest Colorado came together in 2012 and formed the [Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition \(CCCC\)](#). Since then the CCCC has concentrated on providing public education to ensure the protection of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes.

Drawn to the Yampa Valley of northwestern Colorado in late summer and early fall, the Rocky Mountain population comes together at this “staging area” for several weeks to rest and feed before migrating south for the winter. The Yampa River and its abundant, surrounding wetlands provide an ideal roosting site for the cranes, while irrigated hay meadows are a source of insects, frogs and plants and, most importantly, waste grain from the harvested grain fields. This combination of habitat and available food makes for a perfect stop for the migrating Sandhills.

“Crops for Cranes” is a project spearheaded by the [CCCC](#) to collaborate with grain farmers and landowners in the Yampa Valley. Through these partnerships, the Coalition hopes to secure reliable sources of grain in the future for the congregating Greater Sandhill Cranes while also guaranteeing a greater opportunity for festival attendees to view large numbers of cranes. The CCCC feels that these experiences play a critical role in educating the public about Sandhills, the environment and the role agriculture has in the conservation of wildlife in the Yampa Valley.

To read more about “Crops for Cranes,” click here:  
<https://coloradocranes.net/programs-2/crops-for-cranes/>

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## Louisiana:

### **Year-old Whooping Cranes migrate to Canada**

In late May 2017, in a move that surprised LDWF and project biologists, two male Whooping Cranes, L3-16 and L4-16, from Louisiana’s non-migratory population, flew approximately 1,650 miles in 9 days to Saskatchewan, Canada! A LDWF update on June 23 reported that data from L3-16’s remote transmitter indicated that he began moving again a few weeks earlier, traveling 550 more miles to settle just south of the U.S./Canadian border. It was assumed that L4-16 was still with him, although his remote transmitter seemed to have failed.

If the cranes return to Louisiana and breed successfully next year, it could mark the beginning of a new migrating population. This would be a positive step forward in the conservation of the species.

Keep up with the Louisiana Whoopers by checking for updates on the cranes, nesting activity and new chicks on the LDWF Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/>

### **Louisiana population update**

The Louisiana Whooping Crane population currently stands at a maximum of 52 individuals (27 males, 24 females and 1 unknown - Wild-hatched juvenile LW3-17). As of August 19, 2017, the flock’s distribution included: 42 cranes in Louisiana, 6 in Texas (4 are north of Houston, while 2 remain in Jefferson Co., TX), 2 in Arkansas and 2 in the Canadian province of Alberta.

The Louisiana population has been featured in two issues of the *Louisiana Conservationist*.  
*Louisiana Conservationist* / Spring 2011 issue

[http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past\\_issues/2011-vol-64-no-2/](http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past_issues/2011-vol-64-no-2/)

*Back Where They Belong: Whooping Cranes Return to Louisiana*

*Whooping Cranes Return to White Lake: Restoration Begins in Southwest Louisiana Marshes*

*Louisiana Conservationist* / Summer 2017 issue

[http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past\\_issues/2017-vol-67-no-2/](http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past_issues/2017-vol-67-no-2/)

*A Family Affair, Senseless Shootings*

## **Will end of Patuxent breeding program affect the Louisiana population?**

While the Whooping Crane captive breeding program at the USGS [Patuxent Wildlife Research Center \(PWRC\)](#) is scheduled to end in fiscal year 2018, those involved with the Louisiana Whooping Crane reintroduction project have been assured by the [International Whooping Crane Recovery Team](#) and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that it is still a priority.

Because Whooping Cranes are sensitive to disturbance and change, there may be a decrease in the captive production of eggs and chicks when the cranes at Patuxent are transferred to new breeding facilities. But, for this year, Patuxent has raised 7 chicks (3 males, 4 females) to send to Louisiana for release later this fall. Additional chicks are being raised at the [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#) in Wisconsin and the [Audubon Species Survival Center \(ASSC\)](#) in New Orleans.

To read "Closure of the Whooping Crane Propagation Program at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center," by John B. French, Jr., Ph.D., Director of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in his July 14, 2017 Fact Sheet, go here:

<http://operationmigration.org/InTheField/2017/07/14/more-on-patuxent-closure/>

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## **Maryland:**

### **Patuxent Wildlife Research Center ends Whooper breeding program**

**Editor's note:** *The following appeared in the Birding Community E-bulletin / August 2017*

"Established in the 1930s by the FDR Administration, the Patuxent Research Refuge is the nation's only National Wildlife Refuge established to support wildlife research. Today, most of the research is conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. The refuge and the center have been essentially synonymous for about 80 years. Unfortunately, both arms of science at Patuxent - USGS and USFWS - are likely to suffer drastic budget cuts in the ongoing federal budget tug-of-war.

"One of the first casualties will be the Whooping Crane Propagation Program, an effort that began in 1966 with the arrival at Patuxent of an injured juvenile Whooping Crane. Since then, the program grew to produce hundreds of captive-breeding crane eggs and young. The program has had its ups and downs, but last summer the associated Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership crafted a new five-year plan to use these captive hatched chicks to boost the experimental Wisconsin Whooping Crane population.

"Nevertheless, the Whooping Crane Propagation Program at Patuxent will close in FY18 and the approximately 75 cranes at Patuxent will be moved to other institutions. Those in charge of Patuxent admit that 'there likely will be a disruption of reproduction in those birds for the 2018 season and beyond' and it may 'slow the rate of production of chicks for reintroduction of Whooping Cranes, at least temporarily.'

"One has to wonder how this original Endangered Species Act flagship effort, once ended, will be able to effectively continue to advance the cause of crane conservation."



You can access all the past Birding Community E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

**Editor's note:** See the following link to a list of USGS programs, including the Whooping Crane Propagation Program, eliminated or gutted due to substantial FY 2018 budget cuts by the current administration.

## **United States Geological Survey (USGS) Program Changes / 2018 Budget Justification**

As stated in this Program Change document, "...The 2018 budget request proposes various reductions in programs, but reflects a commitment to executing core USGS mission responsibilities. The USGS focus continues to be providing impartial scientific data and leading-edge research that supports policies and decisions that promote the health, safety, and prosperity of the Nation. With this proposed requested budget, the USGS is reducing or eliminating programs...."

*Under Wildlife Program (Page E-4 of document)*

**"Eliminate Whooping Crane Propagation Program (-\$1,500,000/-5 FTE):** This eliminates the largest dedicated captive breeding effort for Endangered Species Act-listed cranes and eliminates capacity within Interior for avian studies that require controlled studies with large, rare birds. The program, while providing valuable contributions to whooping crane recovery, is no longer required to meet species recovery goals."

*To read the United States Geological Survey (USGS) report of 2018 budget cuts to 40 of its programs, or to download a pdf of the report, go here:*

<https://prd-wret.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/s3fs-public/atoms/files/2018%20Summary%20of%20Program%20Changes.pdf>

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## **Mississippi:**

### **Why the MS Sandhill Crane National Refuge cannot be "moved"**

When there was talk among politicians about "moving" the [Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge](#) to develop the prime land around the Interstate-10 interchange in Gautier, it was met with disbelief. Established in 1975 the refuge takes up 30 square miles of the county and protects not only the [Mississippi Sandhill Cranes](#) but an entire ecosystem associated with the threatened wet-pine savanna that has all but disappeared along the Gulf Coast.

The area of Gautier-Vancleave Road at I-10 – was "ground zero" in a legal battle that delayed construction of the interstate in the mid-1970's. In the early 1960's, state wildlife management biologist Jacob M. Valentine, Jr. had been assigned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor and report on a non-migratory subspecies of Sandhill Cranes found only in Mississippi. Valentine confirmed a population of about 40 cranes nesting in and around the area.

"...In a 1963 report titled 'The Status of the Florida Sandhill Crane in Jackson County, Mississippi' Valentine stated that the proposed route of I-10 would 'cross through the area used by the cranes as nesting, loafing, roosting, and feeding grounds'. Valentine wrote in the report that at that time the greatest threats to the continued existence of the crane flock were timber management, housing developments, and the proposed I-10, and of the three the first was cause for the most immediate concern. The report concluded by recommending that the 'most obvious solution' to avoid detrimental impacts to the Crane would be to create a sanctuary comprising 5,000 to 10,000 acres in the area north of U.S. Highway 90, between Highway 57 and the junction of the Earl Bond and Martin Bluff Roads. Valentine also recommended that the route of I-10 be placed two or three miles north of the 1963 survey line, thereby

placing the highway on the northern edge of the breeding territory, and that if the route could not be changed then entry-exits should be limited to one at Highway 57 and one at the Earl Bond Road....”

The question of the area development went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court where an [appeals court decision](#) based on the Endangered Species Act was upheld. The Mississippi Sandhill Crane court battle was a landmark case that validated the Endangered Species Act.

Read more here: <http://www.sunherald.com/news/local/counties/jackson-county/article158903104.html>

To read the full text of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), go here:  
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/laws/esa/text.htm#section7>

To read the 1976 U.S. Court of Appeals ruling, *National Wildlife Federation et al., Plaintiffs-appellants, v. William T. Coleman, Secretary of Transportation, et al., defendants-appellees*, 529 F.2d 359 (5th Cir. 1976) go here: <http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/529/359/386906/>

To read the [U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, Comprehensive Conservation Plan September 2007, click here.](#)

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## **Nebraska:**

### **Platte River project to benefit migrating Whoopers and river**

The main feature of the proposed Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) water project will be approximately 6.5 miles of 5-6 feet tall berms, spread over roughly 300 grassland acres in the southeast corner of the 3,000-acre Cottonwood Ranch. The property is owned by the Nebraska Public Power District and managed by the PRRIP on the south side of the river between Elm Creek and Overton.

The Cottonwood Ranch land was acquired as wet meadow and lowland grassland habitat, but according to PRRIP Director of Habitat Management and Rehabilitation, Jason Farnsworth, there were issues keeping water in this area. Although now, when completed, the grassland acres will operate as a broad-scale recharge project that can hold water from the Platte if there is a flow beyond targets set by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Not only will the completed PRRIP water project provide ideal “stopover” habitat of several hundred acres of 6-14” deep water for migrating Whooping Cranes to roost and forage, but it will provide the ability to retine water in the river.

*The Platte Program is a combined effort of the U.S. Department of Interior, Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado to protect critical habitat in and around the Central Platte River for threatened and endangered species: Whooping Cranes, interior Least Terns and Piping Plovers.*

To read Lori Potter’s article, “Berm-focused PRRIP water project to proceed,” in the Kearney Hub, go here:

[http://www.kearneyhub.com/news/local/berm-focused-prrip-water-project-to-proceed/article\\_a3573d66-6009-11e7-bc4d-fb94bf60eab4.html](http://www.kearneyhub.com/news/local/berm-focused-prrip-water-project-to-proceed/article_a3573d66-6009-11e7-bc4d-fb94bf60eab4.html)

### **Sandhill Cranes – a \$14.3 million boost to Central Nebraska economy**

A study led by the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) shows the economic impact of tourism in central Nebraska during the 2017 Sandhill Crane migration was \$14.3 million.

*“Ecotourism is an emerging opportunity for Nebraska’s tourism industry. One particularly important ecotourism event in Nebraska is the Sandhill Crane Migration. Each spring more than 600 thousand Sandhill Cranes stop along Nebraska’s Platte River valley to rest and refuel before flying further north to*

*breeding grounds. Because of the cranes, organizations devoted to crane preservation, education, and watching exist and bring new money to the Central Nebraska economy by attracting donations and grants to support these efforts. Also, the cranes attract tourists to the area who spend money in hotels, restaurants, and other businesses, and this new spending supports output, employment, and wages in the regional economy.”*

The annual migration was responsible for:

- A \$14.3 million economic impact in a 13-county area
- 182 full-time jobs created
- \$379,000 generated per year in property, sales and lodging tax revenue across the region
- 46,500 people visited in 2017 during the Sandhill migration, including 43,300 non-Central Nebraska residents
- Non-central Nebraska visitors had a total economic impact of \$10.58 million, with 136 jobs created
- Approximately \$93.37 spent per day by visitors
- [Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary](#) near Gibbon and [Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center](#) near Alda creates 46 full-time equivalent jobs and had a total economic impact of \$3.72 million on the Central Nebraska economy.

To read more about the University of Nebraska at Kearney study, go here:

<http://unknews.unk.edu/2017/07/12/unk-study-economic-impact-of-sandhill-cranes-in-central-nebraska-i-14-3m/>

To read or download a PDF of the UNK report by Bree L. Dority, Eric Thompson, Shawn Kaskie and Lisa Tschauner, go here: **Economic Impact of the Annual Crane Migration on Central Nebraska 2017**

or here: <http://unknews.unk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Crane-Economic-Impact-Study.pdf>

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## Tennessee:

### **Statewide Sandhill Crane season**

Beginning this year, the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission established a statewide Sandhill Crane hunting season that expanded the hunt beyond southeast Tennessee. The 2017-18 season will be December 2 - January 28, 2018 with a three-day closure (Friday January 12 - Sunday January 14, 2018) in the Southeast Crane Zone for the annual Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival.

A total of 1,200 tags were available for 400 applicants 13-years and older. Tags will not be valid until hunters have passed a mandatory ID test and a 2017 “Sandhill Crane ID Test” validation code is written on the tag. Applicants had to have a current Tennessee hunting/fishing license (Type 001) and a waterfowl license (Type 005) or equivalent.

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## Texas:

### **Freshwater inflow tied to habitat and fate of wild Whooping Crane population**

The [Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority \(GBRA\)](#) and [The Aransas Project \(TAP\)](#) undertook the first step in the implementation of The [Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority/The Aransas Project Agreement \(GBRA/TAP Agreement\)](#), announcing the receipt of a grant from the [Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation \(www.CGMF.org\)](#), a Texas-based, mission-driven, grant-making foundation that “seeks innovative, sustainable solutions for human and environmental problems.”

The grant is to develop a strategy and action plan to advance implementation of the GBRA/TAP Agreement toward a shared vision for future habitat and water for Guadalupe River System and San Antonio Bay. Developed in 2016, the GBRA/TAP agreement was reached after years of litigation over freshwater inflows for San Antonio Bay and the long-term success of the only remaining flock of wild whooping cranes in the world.

*To learn more, read this release by The Aransas Project, “Grant to Initiate the GBRA/TAP Agreement: Goal to Address Long-Term Water Supply Needs in Guadalupe Basin and Safeguard Critical Whooping Crane Habitat,” go here: <http://thearansasproject.org/basin-management/grant-to-initiate-the-gbratap-agreement/>*

*For more information, contact:*

Todd Votteler, [tvotteler@gbra.org](mailto:tvotteler@gbra.org) or (830) 379-5822 and  
Jim Blackburn, [jbb@blackburncarter.com](mailto:jbb@blackburncarter.com) or (713) 501-9840

## **Hurricane Harvey damages the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory**

The [Gulf Coast Bird Observatory \(GCBO\)](#) was inundated by flood waters as a result of Hurricane Harvey. Located in Lake Jackson, Texas, GCBO’s trails, field house, and general property sustained considerable damage.

The mission of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) is to protect the birds and their habitats around the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. The observatory is recognized as an innovative organization for the design and conduct of large conservation projects, including migration studies, habitat enhancement, land acquisition and regional habitat mapping.

Help contribute to the cleanup of the observatory by visiting the GCBO Facebook page or its website, and click on the *GCBO Hurricane Recovery Fund*. Donations will go directly to the restoration and rebuilding of GCBO.

*To contribute go here: <https://www.facebook.com/GulfCoastBirdObservatory/>  
Or, here: <http://www.gcbo.org/>*

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## **Wisconsin:**

### **Crane Foundation announces \$10M expansion for Baraboo Headquarters**

The [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#) is the only place on earth where all 15 of the world’s crane species can be viewed in one place. The nonprofit’s 300-acre headquarters just north of Baraboo, Wisconsin is home to wildlife exhibits that showcase crane species. In nature, the large, migratory birds inhabit five continents and fly across deserts, mountains, frozen tundra and hundreds of international borders each year.

In June 2017, at its “Evening with the Cranes” event, ICF unveiled plans for a \$10-million expansion to the organization’s headquarters in Baraboo. A new visitor center and expansion of many of the crane exhibits will take place over the next three years. ICF plans to break ground for the new improvements in June 2018, with construction completed by the spring of 2020. According to Kim Smith, ICF VP of Headquarters Operations, it will be the largest expansion project the International Crane Foundation has ever undertaken.

“We want to inspire our community to recognize the importance of cranes on our landscape, along with the important conservation work that the International Crane Foundation does, and let people know how they can be a part of that effort as well,” said ICF Visitor Program Manager Cully Shelton during the “Cranes of the World Festival” held there in August.

“This is a gateway to our mission – to save the cranes and also the environments in which they live,” said Pamela Seelman, ICF Marketing and Communications Director.

*To read an informative article by Jim Massey, “Saving amazing birds, amazing places: International Crane Foundation only spot in world housing all 15 species,” go here:*

<http://www.thecountrytoday.com/Country-Life/Country-Life-News/2017/07/05/Saving-amazing-birds-amazing-places.html>

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## Habitat Matters!

### 2017 Gulf Coast Conservation grants awarded

[Southern Company](#), along with the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation \(NFWF\)](#) and other public and private partners, has announced the 2017 national grants under the [Gulf Coast Conservation Grant Program \(GCCGP\)](#). Southern Company-sponsored grants help fund projects that restore and maintain the ecology of coastal bird species across Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.

The GCCGP supports a variety of conservation projects that focus on enhancing coastal habitats and bolstering priority fish and wildlife populations along the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning in 2003 Southern Company and NFWF have partnered through the [Power of Flight Program](#) and restored or enhanced more than 478,000 acres of high-priority habitat for bird species, including Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Northern Bobwhite, Whooping Crane, coastal waterbirds and shorebirds, and other imperiled species. To date, 89 Power of Flight-supported projects have been implemented across the Southeast in states where Southern Company's electric-utility subsidiaries are located.

This year [Wildlife Mississippi](#) is one of the organizations awarded GCCGP grants supported by the Southern Company's Power of Flight Program and has plans to place 80-acres of grassland in Jackson County, Mississippi, under permanent conservation easement. The project will protect an agricultural property that provides important habitat for the critically endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane. The property is currently used by up to nine cranes – seven percent of the wild Mississippi population – for foraging and raising colts.

*To read more about the grants awarded by Southern Company and partners, go here:*

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/southern-company-and-partners-announce-2017-gulf-coast-conservation-grants-300508295.html>

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## Indiana:

### Cranes find home in Henry Co. at Wilbur Wright FWA

The [Wilbur Wright Fish & Wildlife Area](#) comprises 1,070 acres of river valleys and associated uplands. The Big Blue River is the western boundary, and the dark, organic soil floodplain occupies approximately one-third of the property. The remainder of the property is the adjacent uplands and the Little Blue River valley. The property has areas of mature woods, fallow cropland, prairie grasses and forbs, and other areas of early to mid-successional habitat. The property also has areas of annual and perennial wildlife food plots. There is a small wetland near the Big Blue River.

Wilbur Wright was surplus state lands transferred from the Indiana Department of Mental Health (New Castle State Hospital) to the Department of Natural Resources' Division of State Parks in 1972. The acreage was then transferred to the Division of Fish & Wildlife in 1974, when wildlife management began. Tree plantings were made and food plots planted throughout the property.

In 2014 a pair of Sandhill Cranes successfully nested and fledged one juvenile in the Wilbur Wright FWA. Since then the pair has returned to the area each year and successfully fledged twin colts each season. "There are numerous successful nesting cranes in the northern tier of Indiana counties, but this pair is the furthest south documented breeding of Sandhill Cranes in Indiana," regional biologist Kent Hanauer said.

While the actual nest site has not been found, there is a marshy area in the northwest portion of the property that could provide ideal habitat for nesting. Once the colts have hatched, the adults move to crop fields on private property just north of the FWA, where they have been routinely observed from CR 300N.

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## Montana:

### **West Valley Wetlands Conservation Project nears funding mark**

In a study conducted by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Bird Conservation Partnership, an area northwest of Kalispell, Montana near Stillwater River was found to be a staging area used by Sandhill Cranes during migration. Based on these findings the Flathead Land Trust moved to protect the area by way of a conservation easement.

For the last 18 months, the Flathead Land Trust has worked to reach its fundraising goal of \$150,000 in non-federal matches in order to qualify to receive federal funding for the West Valley Wetland conservation project. The easement will protect almost 400 acres of family farmland that supports approximately 144 species of birds, and includes a unique 45-acre pothole wetland used by tens of thousands of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes.

The project includes plans for a bird-viewing area for use by Kalispell students and teachers as well as the general public to observe birds in a wetland setting.

Last fall and this spring, Flathead Audubon, the AGL Foundation, Montana Ducks Unlimited, Flathead Pheasants Forever, the International Crane Foundation, and over 60 individuals donated to the project. Other supporters of the project include Whitefish Community Foundation, Flathead Beacon Foundation, and the Applied Materials Foundation. For more information on the West Valley Wetlands project or to make a donation, visit <http://www.flatheadlandtrust.org> or call 406-752-8293.

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## Nebraska:

### **Rainwater Basin**

Stretching across parts of 19 counties in southeast and southcentral Nebraska, the Rainwater Basin region falls between the Platte and Republican rivers.

Before farmers started planting acres of corn and soybeans, "you would have had a sea of mixed grass prairie with playa wetlands, which are shallow ephemeral wetlands scattered across this region. Historically, there were 11,000 playa wetlands, covering over 200,000 acres," said Andy Bishop, coordinator with the [Rainwater Basin Joint Venture](#) – a partnership of many groups and agencies working to conserve this wetland habitat, largely because of its incredible importance for migrating birds.

The [Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network](#) designated the [Rainwater Basin](#) as a landscape of hemispheric importance in 2008. It is estimated that 8.6 million waterfowl in the Central Flyway use this region during spring migration, along with 500,000 shore birds and the wild population of Whooping Cranes.



Due in large part to the impact of agriculture, 90 percent of the wetland basins and 80 percent of the wetland acres are now gone from the landscape. However, with the continuing work of the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, USFWS, conservation easements and partnerships formed with landowners and farmers, the plants, fauna and flora that once existed throughout the Rainwater Basin wetlands are slowly being restored. Habitat for migrating birds is being improved with the help of grazing, prescribed fire and removal of invasive plants.

*To listen to the NET News (Nebraska's PBS & NPR stations) piece by Ariana Brocious about this unique habitat and for a map of the area, go here:*

<http://netnebraska.org/article/news/1087694/nebraskas-unique-habitats-rainwater-basin>

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## Ohio:

### **Snow Lake Preserve**

The Nature Conservancy's 272-acre [Snow Lake Preserve](#), located in Geauga County, Ohio features an ancient [kettle lake](#). The kettle lake is surrounded by emergent marsh, sedge meadow and shrub swamp. The low hills around the lake support upland forest with scattered swamp forests and vernal pools. Snow Lake Preserve is considered to be the keystone of a vast network of lakes, ponds, streams and swamps that make up a 20,000-acre wetland complex of boggy bottomland known as the Cuyahoga Wetlands – an area that hasn't been drastically altered since the last glacial sheet receded 10,000 years ago. The preserve supports a variety of birds including migratory and nesting ducks, geese, Trumpeter Swans and Sandhill Cranes, which nest on the property.

Snow Lake was part of the Western Reserve granted to Oliver Snow, a Revolutionary War veteran. It was developed in the early 1900s as a hunting and fishing club and was previously owned by a founding family for more than six decades. The Holzheimer family, grandchildren of the property's original owner, sold the 282-acre Snow Lake Preserve to the conservancy on July 5 for \$2.6 million.

What makes the Snow Lake Preserve such an environmental treasure is its integral place in a vast filtration system that helps to purify the drinking water for more than 1.6 million people in the two largest metropolitan areas in Northeast Ohio: Cleveland and Akron.

The new property is located adjacent to the southern boundary of the Conservancy's 376-acre Lucia S. Nash Preserve (a National Natural Landmark), and a few miles southeast of Punderson State Park. According to Terry Seidel, the Nature Conservancy Director of Protection, linking the properties will allow the organization to better protect the species and habitats.

*To learn more about the preserve, and for a map of, photos and an aerial video of the property and interview with the Nature Conservancy's Director of Protection, Terry Seidel, go here:*

[http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2017/08/geauga\\_countys\\_snow\\_lake\\_prese\\_1.html](http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2017/08/geauga_countys_snow_lake_prese_1.html)

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL impact issues:**

### **Senate Environment and Public Works Committee passes "HELP"**

In June 2017, the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works passed the "Hunting Heritage and Environmental Legacy Preservation (HELP) for Wildlife Act," S. 1514. The bipartisan legislation, overwhelmingly supported by approximately 55 hunting and fishing groups, reauthorizes or establishes several important wildlife conservation programs. The HELP for Wildlife Act will also provide "regulatory clarity" for sportsmen or, according to Chairman John Barrasso, "the HELP Wildlife Act

promotes conservation based on sound science and provides needed protections for America's sportsmen."

Included in the HELP Wildlife Act are reauthorizations until 2023 of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the Chesapeake Bay Program, as well as the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails network and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Grants Assistance Program.

Unfortunately, the HELP Wildlife Act also attempts to prohibit judicial review of the USFWS decision to remove Endangered Species Act protection for the Gray Wolf in the Great Lakes area and in Wyoming; prevents the Environmental Protection Agency from limiting toxic chemicals such as lead in fishing equipment; eliminates part of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by excluding large areas of land from the definition of "baited area;" and promotes the building and expansion of public target-shooting ranges on public land.

With no exemptions under the Toxic Substances Control Act on the use of lead shot and or lead sport-fishing equipment, aquatic environments and the wildlife dependent on those areas – including water and wading birds such as loons, Whooping Cranes, gulls, swans, geese, egrets, and herons – will be at risk from lead poisoning. As there are already alternative metals used in both hunting and fishing equipment, there is seemingly no good reason to run the risk of poisoning wildlife and degrading habitat based solely on recreational practices.

Similarly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service already routinely issues depredation permits that allow agricultural interests to kill birds to reduce crop damage, making the HELP Wildlife Act provision unnecessary to ensure that normal agricultural practices are not mischaracterized as otherwise prohibited attempts to bait migratory game birds.

Finally, HELP for Wildlife promises to provide funding and support for the construction and expansion of public target-shooting ranges on national forests and Bureau of Land Management lands. Hunting proponents say public ranges are in short supply, so that the Act will help meet the increasing demand for "safe places to shoot." (Wildlife enthusiasts using the same public land may feel otherwise.)

To view full text of the legislation, go here: [https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/a/0/a00ac139-d046-4ae1-813e-25c74c63dfa7/0F73B685A5BBFD76AD4C2DDD58E5BD6A.s.-1514.pdf](https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a/0/a00ac139-d046-4ae1-813e-25c74c63dfa7/0F73B685A5BBFD76AD4C2DDD58E5BD6A.s.-1514.pdf)

For more on the bipartisan act and a list of supporters, go here: <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/help-for-wildlife-act>

## California:

### **Conservation groups file lawsuit over Delta Tunnels project**

On August 21, 2017, a coalition of conservation groups sued the California Department of Water Resources over its approval of the controversial Delta tunnels project.

The lawsuit was filed in the Sacramento Superior Court by at least 58 groups, including the [AquAlliance](#), [California Sportfishing Protection Alliance](#), [California Water Impact Network](#), [Center for Biological Diversity](#), [Center for Food Safety](#), [Friends of the River](#), [Friends of Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge](#), [Planning and Conservation League](#), [Restore the Delta](#), [Save Our Sandhill Cranes](#) and [Sierra Club California](#), an alliance of crab boat owners, an American Indian tribe dependent on salmon fishing, several Sacramento Valley water agencies, the cities of Folsom and Roseville, and San Joaquin, Solano and Yolo counties.

"Californians aren't going to sit back and let this multibillion-dollar boondoggle destroy the Bay-Delta ecosystem and what's left of our salmon runs," said Jeff Miller at the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), one of

the groups suing. “This Southern California water grab would be an economic and ecological nightmare for everyone.”

The two giant Delta tunnels, both expected to be as wide as a four-story building is tall, would withdraw enormous amounts of freshwater from the Sacramento River to pumping plants in the South Delta. The tunnels could divert up to 15,000 cubic feet per second, on top of diversions from the existing Delta pumping facilities of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project.

The water diversions would significantly degrade environmental conditions in the Delta by reducing flows, increasing salinity, damaging the food web and promoting harmful algal blooms. They would prevent flows needed for fish habitat and water quality, during critical life stages for protected fish species including chinook salmon, steelhead trout, green sturgeon, and delta and longfin smelt. Transmission lines associated with the tunnels project are also likely to harm and kill Greater Sandhill Cranes, in violation of California’s “fully protected species” statutes.

**Update:** On August 28, 2017 in a 5 to 2 vote, the [Central Basin Water Agency](#) board decided to postpone a decision on the Delta Tunnels project in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta citing need for more information on local impact. The Board will meet again in late September.

To learn more about the role the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) plays in this lawsuit and to read Dale Kasler’s article, “Dozens are suing to block Delta tunnels. Will it matter?” go here: <http://www.sacbee.com/news/state/california/water-and-drought/delta/article168497632.html>

## Nebraska:

### **Keystone XL pipeline would endanger Whooping Cranes and natural resources**

During a four-day hearing in June 2017 by the Nebraska Public Service Commission, testimony was submitted for review by the Commission in the process to determine whether the proposed Keystone XL pipeline is in the public interest. Nebraska’s approval is one of the final necessary steps before pipeline builder TransCanada could begin the 1,179-mile project.

Experts testifying on behalf of [Bold Nebraska](#), an alliance of Nebraska farmers, ranchers, Tribal Nations and citizens to stop the Keystone XL pipeline, and the Sierra Club said the pipeline would be disastrous for the state’s natural resources and that the miles of new electrical transmission lines needed by the proposed pipeline project would significantly increase the possibility of Whooping Crane deaths.

Powerline strikes are the primary cause of death for Whooping Cranes, said [Paul Johnsgard](#), an authority on Whooping Cranes and a retired University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor, and the Keystone XL would “significantly” increase deaths. Whooping Cranes are most susceptible when they’re landing or taking off from roosting and foraging sites, which are common across the state. Their migratory route roughly follows the pipeline route across Nebraska. “We need to reduce the threats to this magnificent bird, not increase them.”

TransCanada disputes contentions that new transmission lines associated with the proposed Keystone XL pipeline would harm endangered Whooping Cranes, stating that the additional lines represent only a 0.4 percent increase in the 5,471 miles of transmission lines that already exist in the migratory corridor used by the cranes, therefore posing only a minor risk to them. The U.S. State Department said with its biological assessment of the XL that the pipeline “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” Whooping Cranes.

Both proponents and opponents of the controversial pipeline submitted written arguments for the August 7-11, 2017 hearing before the Nebraska Public Service Commission. The five elected commissioners now have until November 23, 2017 to reach a decision. Their review includes approximately 20,000 pages of documents and comments from about half-million people who weighed in on the project, either in writing or in person at four public hearings over the summer. September 15, 2017 was the deadline for

lawyers representing TransCanada and landowners, environmental groups and tribes opposing the Keystone XL to submit closing briefs to the Public Service Commission.

To read more about and hear from some attending the public hearings, go here:

[http://www.omaha.com/news/nebraska/keystone-xl-pipeline-would-imperil-whooping-cranes-natural-resources-experts/article\\_eed0063e-6886-5967-a168-2cc961efa150.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/nebraska/keystone-xl-pipeline-would-imperil-whooping-cranes-natural-resources-experts/article_eed0063e-6886-5967-a168-2cc961efa150.html)

And here:

[Sides spar on Keystone XL's impact on Whooping Cranes, Native American artifacts](http://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/sides-spar-on-keystone-xl-s-impact-on-whooping-cranes/article_3684ec3c-645e-57d1-9c18-7faa2eda38f9.html)

[http://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/sides-spar-on-keystone-xl-s-impact-on-whooping-cranes/article\\_3684ec3c-645e-57d1-9c18-7faa2eda38f9.html](http://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/sides-spar-on-keystone-xl-s-impact-on-whooping-cranes/article_3684ec3c-645e-57d1-9c18-7faa2eda38f9.html)

To read the transcript of testimony given by Dr. Paul Johnsgard on Keystone XL and Whooping Cranes deaths, before the Nebraska Public Service Commission, go here:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/350773188/Testimony-of-Paul-Johnsgard-on-Whooping-Cranes>

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## Science News:

### An Unusual Journey of Non-Migratory Whooping Cranes

Matthew A. **Hayes**, Anne E. **Lacy**, Jeb **Barzen**, Sara E. **Zimorski**, Kristin A.L. **Hall**, and Koji **Suzuki**. (2007). *An Unusual Journey of Non-migratory Whooping Cranes*. *Southeastern Naturalist*. 6. 551-558. 10.1656/1528-7092(2007)6[551:AUJONW]2.0.CO;2.

**Abstract** - In 2000, an adult pair of non-migratory *Grus americana* (Whooping Crane) left Florida and settled in Michigan for the summer. On 21 November, the pair left Michigan and was radio-tracked south to the north shore of Lake Erie. The next day, only the female was detected. She was tracked to Kissimmee Prairie, FL, her release site as a subadult. This female flew from Michigan to Florida in 11 days, only stopping for 2 of those days. Her movement and flight behavior approximated natural Whooping Crane migration behavior. That this adult female could return to her release area and physiologically prepare for a long flight suggests migration is both learned and innate. Our conclusions help refine reintroduction techniques possible for migratory cranes.

A full-text PDF download is available from Jeb Barzen at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232674221\\_An\\_Unusual\\_Journey\\_of\\_Non-migratory\\_Whooping\\_Cranes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232674221_An_Unusual_Journey_of_Non-migratory_Whooping_Cranes)

### British Columbia researchers are on a crane feather hunt

In an effort to learn more about the Sandhill Crane populations in British Columbia, Canada scientists plan to use DNA from feathers to determine whether there are genetic differences between the coastal cranes and their east-of-the-mountains relatives. The two groups may have been separated thousands of years ago during the last Ice Age. Differences between the populations may be the result of ecological adaptation to living on the bogs and beaches on the coast vs. living in marshes and forest in the interior. Cranes breeding in the Northeast belong to yet another population. Habitat used by these cranes in the U.S. in fall and winter is under threat, and they may benefit from protection and population-level management in British Columbia.

Additionally, the *Coastal Crane Atlas* is a project to map breeding areas of the small population of Sandhill Cranes that summers along the coast of B.C. and southeast Alaska. These cranes winter in central California and on the Lower Columbia River. In spring and summer, they can be seen foraging along beaches, but they generally nest and roost in upland wetlands. The size of this population is not currently known and their breeding habitat is largely unprotected. It is thought that cranes from this population belong to a different subspecies (Canadian Sandhill Crane – *Grus canadensis rowani*) than

the Lesser Sandhill Cranes breeding further north and west in Alaska, which make up the majority of the Pacific Flyway Population.

Data will be shared with the North American Crane Working Group and the International Crane Foundation.

**Abstract:** Three subspecies of Sandhill Crane occur in British Columbia (B.C.): Lesser (*Antigone canadensis canadensis*), Greater (*A.c. tabida*), and Canadian (*A.c. rowani*), the latter being of uncertain taxonomic status (Cooper 1996). Historically, subspecies were delineated by morphology and breeding range. Although several genetics studies undertaken to resolve the question of population substructure in Sandhill Cranes have found that *A.c. rowani* is not distinct from *A.c. tabida* and/or *A.c. canadensis*, none have included samples taken from coastal-breeding birds of the Pacific Flyway Population, which may be subject to ecological as well as geographic forces of differentiation. With a diet that has marine-derived components and is abruptly different to diets across the rest of this crane's range, with a body size and bill morphology different from cranes found nesting north and south of the coastal range, and with a different suite of predators, these cranes are unique. We propose to collect non-invasive samples (moulted feathers) from cranes breeding in coastal habitats as well as in interior plateau habitats of B.C. Mitochondrial and nuclear gene samples will be sequenced and compared across these regions, and compared with samples from other populations in North America. The results of this work will help to elucidate the population genetic structure of cranes nesting west of the Rocky Mountains, and will help to prioritize conservation needs for this species.

To read more about the project, for contact information and for an [interactive map of sightings and coordinates](https://coastalcraneatlas.wordpress.com/the-great-sandhill-crane-feather-hunt/), go here: [The Great Sandhill Crane Feather Hunt](https://coastalcraneatlas.wordpress.com/the-great-sandhill-crane-feather-hunt/), <https://coastalcraneatlas.wordpress.com/the-great-sandhill-crane-feather-hunt/>

To read more about *Grus Canadensis* in the British Columbia Bird Atlas, go here: <http://www.birdatlas.bc.ca/accounts/speciesaccount.jsp?sp=SACR&lang=en>

## **Autumn Foraging and Staging Ecology of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes** (*Antigone canadensis tabida*)

**Abstract:** Spatial and temporal variation in the density and distribution of waste agricultural grain (grain herein) during staging can affect the carrying capacity of habitats that support avian populations. Such variation in food resources can also have proximate effects on behavioural ecology (e.g., influence optimal behaviour). The Eastern Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis tabida*; EP herein) likely began to recolonize Ontario and its historic range starting in the early 1900s and now relies on agricultural grain during migration. Accordingly, ecologists possess little knowledge of how EP crane behavioural ecology may be affected by grain. Thus, my study focused on grain effects on the following topics: 1) age-specific foraging scale and numerical response, 2) age-specific foraging efficiency, and 3) roost use. I used field observation and experimentation, GPS tracking, and GIS analysis to investigate these topics at a key staging area on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. Although adult cranes remain with offspring during autumn staging and juveniles continue to grow and learn, juveniles did not appear to affect family group field use. Relative food density at a scale of 5 km from feeding fields had the strongest effect on field use, approximately aligning with mean foraging flight distance ( $6.4 \pm 0.15$  km) calculated from GPS tracking data. Adult cranes did not forage more efficiently than juveniles; if anything, juveniles may have foraged more efficiently than adults. Alternatively, the social contexts of foragers (e.g., small family flocks or larger mixed flocks) may have obscured age differences in foraging efficiency, grain may not have been sufficiently novel to affect behaviour, or juvenile cranes may learn to forage for grain relatively quickly. Both anthropogenic disturbance and grain affected roost use. Distance to primary paved roads had the most important effect on roost use, although grain density within 12 km of roosts also had an effect. However, road type (e.g., paved, gravel) may not be an accurate index of nighttime traffic when cranes typically use roost wetlands. Thus, I conclude that grain affects crane foraging and roosting behaviour during staging, but effects vary in nature between field use, foraging efficiency, and roost use contexts.

## Citation

Hanna, Everett E., "Autumn Foraging and Staging Ecology of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis tabida*)" (2017). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 4675.  
<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/4675>

For the full-text, go here:

<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6406&context=etd>

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## Kudos:

### International Crane Foundation receives award for keeping Whooping Cranes safe

A press release by the International Crane Foundation (ICF), announced that its Whooping Crane outreach campaign, focused on reducing human-induced mortality, received a regional Award for Conservation Partners through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region.

The campaign was piloted in Alabama through the work of the International Crane Foundation Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator, Lizzie Condon. "Alabama was chosen for this important work because it's a wintering area for Whooping Cranes in the Eastern migratory population," explains Condon. "This campaign is so important because these highly endangered birds still only number approximately 500 in the wild."

Through partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state and non-government organizations, the International Crane Foundation has produced radio and television public service announcements, billboards, workshops for K-12 teachers, outreach events and even a Whooping Crane mascot, "Hope," to raise public awareness to the plight of Whooping Cranes and the need to actively work for their recovery. ICF has been a key partner in expanding participation in the annual Festival of Cranes held at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Decatur, Alabama.

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## Upcoming Events:

### International Crane Foundation Member Appreciation Day

Date: Saturday September 23, 2017

Location: International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, WI

Time: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Mark your calendars for the annual Member Appreciation Day! Sign up early for behind-the-scenes tours of Crane City, which are first-come, first-served the day of the event (Gates open at 9:00 a.m.) Don't miss this rare opportunity to see our captive breeding facility up close. Other special activities include a guided prairie walk, radio-tracking demonstrations, photo opportunities with Hope, our Whooping Crane mascot, and special talks by our expert staff.

Don't forget your membership card! Not a member? Not a problem – [click here to join the flock today](#), [email our staff](#), or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807. Memberships may also be purchased or renewed at the Visitor Center the day of the event.

### Michigan Audubon Sandhill Soirée

Date: Friday, October 13, 2017

Location: Dark Horse Brewing Company  
511 South Kalamazoo Avenue  
Marshall, Michigan 49068

Time: 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM EDT



Join Michigan Audubon at the Sandhill Soirée Birders Social to raise funds to support Sandhill Crane conservation and kick-off [CraneFest 2017](#).

### **2017 CraneFest: Sandhill Crane & Art Festival**

Date: October 14-15, 2017

Location: Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area  
22300 15 Mile Road, Bellevue, Michigan

Time: Noon – 7:00 PM

Join in the festival overlooking Big Marsh Lake and help raise awareness and appreciation of the area's natural heritage and support the ongoing educational and conservation efforts of Michigan Audubon and it's Bernard W. Baker Bird Sanctuary.

Find out more about [CraneFest](#) by visiting [cranefest.org](http://cranefest.org)

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