

Additional Information for the Wisconsin Sandhill Crane Study Committee

1. Does the USFWS believe an update to the 2010 EP SHC Management Plan is needed before establishing a responsible SHC hunt in Wisconsin or any other state in the Mississippi Flyway? Why or why not?

Absolutely not. The management plan for the Eastern Population remains relevant and serves as a good foundation for addressing sandhill crane harvest management in both the Atlantic (17 States) and Mississippi (14 States) Flyways. Sandhill cranes are currently hunted in 3 of the 31 States covered by this plan. The Province of Ontario is planning to hunt sandhill cranes soon, perhaps as early as fall 2025. The basic ecology of this species is reasonably well understood and few significant new studies have occurred since the plan was adopted that would alter assumptions, goals or management strategies. A revision to the plan is likely to benefit from additional data on population abundance and distribution as well as current levels of take (both through depredation permits and sport harvest). These data will allow for a better estimate of total allowable take to stabilize the rapid growth of the population or reduce overabundance in areas with unacceptably high levels of conflict (e.g., crop depredation). Clearly, current levels of harvest and permitted take for depredation are having very limited impact to population growth and range expansion. It is important to note that while the plan may be ready for an update, the US Fish & Wildlife Service also issues an annual status report on all sandhill crane populations in the US and these data are relied upon for making annual harvest regulatory decisions, consistent with the goals of applicable management plans and harvest strategies.

2. Based on the EP SHC population level and growth rate does the USFWS have any concerns with Wisconsin moving forward with a SHC hunt?

No. If Wisconsin chooses to move forward with an experimental sandhill crane hunting season that is (A) endorsed by the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways and (B) consistent with the management plan, Division of Migratory Bird Management staff will develop an appropriate Memorandum of Agreement to detail the conditions and evaluation criteria that will apply before such a hunting season can be made operational.

3. When the 2010 EP SHC Management Plan is reviewed or updated, do you expect the population goal to change from the current 30,000-60,000? What factors would drive a population goal change? With a review or update would you anticipate hunting being eliminated as a plan goal?

Revision of the 2010 Management Plan of the Eastern Population of Sandhill Cranes is currently underway. That revision is the primary responsibility of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways with the technical work being completed by their technical committee representatives, largely State waterfowl biologists and migratory bird program coordinators. Thus, after consultation with the appropriate technical committee chairman, I believe that the revised plan will largely evolve from a management plan to

a harvest strategy due to the health of the overall population, the high growth rate since 2010, and continued range expansion. The 30,000 sandhill crane population level as a minimum is expected to remain because it ensures long-term viability and sustainability of the eastern population. Hunting is not expected to be eliminated as both sport harvest and permitted take of nuisance or conflict birds (i.e., agricultural depredation) are the primary tools to address human-wildlife conflicts with this species. Population modelling is likely to be updated with current harvest and permitted take data to better assess the level of total take that allows for the eastern population to level off or potentially be reduced to levels with more tolerable human-wildlife conflicts while providing for wildlife viewing opportunities. Again, the current level of harvest (1% or less) is having no measurable impact on the growth of the eastern population of sandhill cranes.

4. Does the USFWS adaptive harvest management approach and state harvest allocation formula account for changes in migration patterns and populations? How?

To clarify, Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) is a modelling approach which relies on an iterative cycle of monitoring, assessment, and decision-making to clarify the relationships among hunting regulations, harvest, population abundance, and relevant objectives. It is the approach used for duck harvest management in the US. While its basic concepts are applied to harvest management for sandhill crane populations, the approach used for the eastern population of sandhill cranes is a prescribed strategy detailed within the management plan. Population abundance is used to determine if some level of harvest is appropriate and, when appropriate, also used to determine the total number of permits that can be issued annually for harvest of sandhill cranes. Changes in population abundance, through range expansion or shifts in migration and breeding distribution, are reflected in the formulas used to determine total allowable permits and allocation of those permits among States with a hunting season. States with higher population counts would potentially receive a larger proportion of the allowable permits, assuming they have an operational hunting season and desire to receive available permits. The revised plan will likely rely upon a similar approach for determining allowable harvest and distribution among States with a hunting season, in that it will be a prescribed harvest strategy tied to sandhill crane abundance. It is likely that revised modelling of potential take levels to achieve specific levels of overall population abundance (i.e., revised population level goals) may influence the details of a revised harvest strategy.

Respectfully submitted,

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