



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

5600 American Blvd West, Suite 990
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/R3 RD/MB/Permits

February 2, 2025

The Honorable Paul Tittl, Representative
State of Wisconsin, Joint Legislative Council
Chair, Study Committee on Sandhill Cranes
One East Main Street, Suite 401
Madison, WI 53703-3382

Dear Representative Tittl:

Thank you for your letter dated December 10, 2024.

The mission of the Migratory Bird Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is to promote long-term conservation of migratory birds and encourage joint stewardship with others through regulation, policy, and permitting. The Migratory Bird Permit Office of the Service implements permits and policy under the Migratory Bird Treaty (MBTA) and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Permits enable the public to engage in specific activities consistent with the MBTA and Eagle Act while providing a means to balance use and conservation. Permits also allow us to build partnerships and monitor activities to determine how permitted activities affect migratory bird populations.

MBTA regulations provide for the take of depredating birds in certain circumstances. A federal depredation permit authorizes the permittee to capture or kill birds to help reduce damage to agricultural crops/livestock, private property, human health & safety (including airports), and protected wildlife. A depredation permit is intended to provide short-term relief for bird damage until long-term nonlethal measures can be implemented to eliminate or significantly reduce the problem. Typically, migratory birds taken using a federal depredation permit must be (a) turned over to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for official purposes, (b) donated to a public educational or scientific institution, or (c) completely destroyed by burial or incineration. Our regulations for depredation permits also allow for development of a process where all migratory birds taken under a depredation permit can be donated to charitable or other worthy institutions for use as food.

Regardless of the final disposition of birds allowed for by regulation, the issuance of depredation permits is not intended to provide recreational opportunities or a source of food for permittees or their designees, or to act as a substitute for a regulated hunting season in any given state. The policies that govern use of migratory bird carcasses taken via depredation permits apply equally across all MBTA protected species, whether they have hunting seasons in other states or not.

In 2010, the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyway Councils endorsed a management plan for Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes. One of the plan's provisions included guidelines for potential harvest of this population when the 3-year average of the fall survey is above 30,000 cranes. Kentucky and Tennessee initiated experimental hunting seasons in 2011 and 2013, respectively; the season in Kentucky became operational in 2015 and that for Tennessee in 2017. Alabama initiated an experimental season beginning in the 2019-20 season, and the season

became operational in the 2023-24 season. Hunting seasons for this population of sandhill cranes are allowed between September 1 and January 31 and have a maximum length of 60 days.

Should the State of Wisconsin choose to pursue establishing a hunting season for Sandhill Cranes, the Service can work with you as per the presentation that was given to you on October 1, 2024 by the Mississippi Flyway Representative. For further details on this process and requirements, timelines, etc., please contact David Scott at David_Scott@fws.gov or 612-597-2131.



Larry A. Harrison
USFWS Midwest Region
Permits Chief