

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Sandhill Cranes

A briefing for the Wisconsin Legislative Study Committee

October 1, 2024

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Migratory Bird Program
Conserving America's Birds



Presentation Purpose

Focus on the Role of the US Fish & Wildlife Service

- **Authority for migratory bird management and rule-making**
- **Engagement with key partners, like States, through the Flyway System**
- **Highlight likely next steps and timeline**



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Management of Migratory Birds

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918

- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 ([16 U.S.C. 703-712](#)) implements four international conservation treaties that the U.S. entered into with [Canada in 1916](#), [Mexico in 1936](#), [Japan in 1972](#), and [Russia in 1976](#). It is intended to ensure the sustainability of populations of all protected migratory bird species.
- The law has been amended with the signing of each treaty, as well as when any of the treaties were amended, such as with [Mexico in 1976](#) and [Canada in 1995](#).
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) prohibits the take (including killing, capturing, selling, trading, and transport) of protected migratory bird species without prior [authorization](#) by the Department of Interior U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.





Management of Migratory Birds

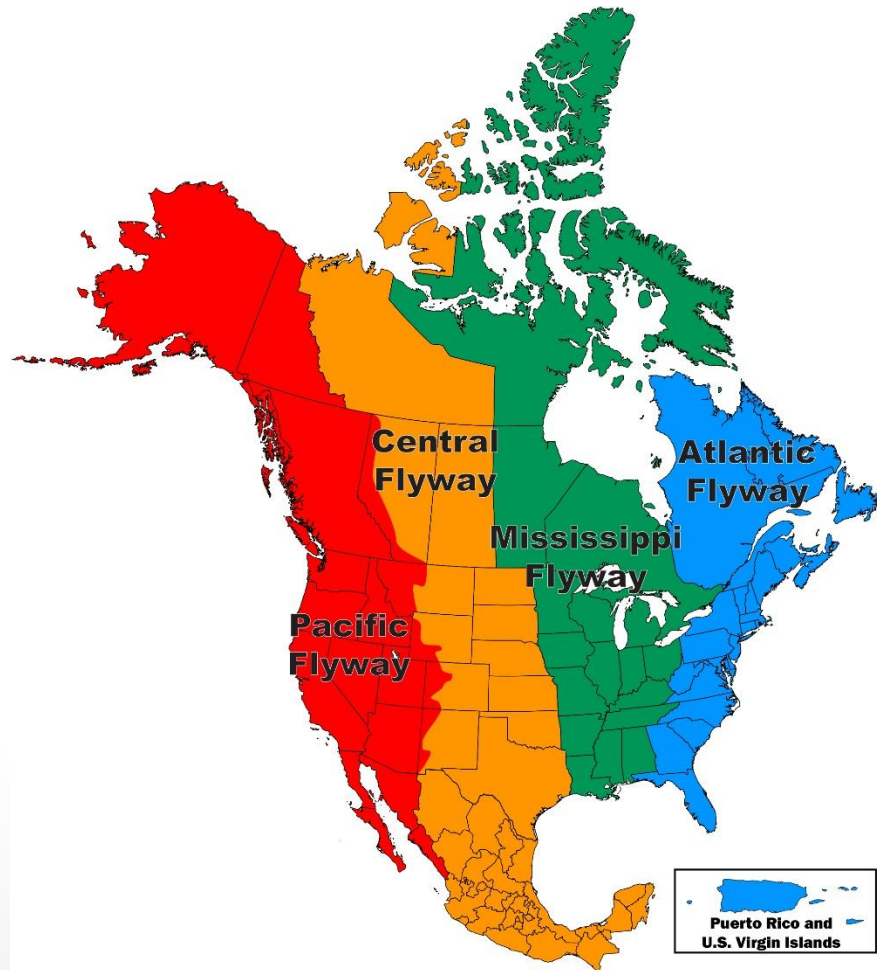
Management of Migratory Birds by Administrative Flyways

- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and its partners manage migratory birds based largely on routes the birds follow as they migrate between nesting and wintering areas.
- Based on those routes, 4 administrative Flyways (Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific) were established in North America to facilitate management of migratory birds and their habitats. Each flyway has a Council, consisting of representatives from each state, provincial, and territorial agency within that Flyway. The Councils are advised by Flyway technical committees consisting of biological staff from their member agencies. The technical committees evaluate population and habitat information and make recommendations to the Councils on matters of migratory bird conservation.
- The Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific Flyways each have a USFWS Flyway Representative who works with the Flyway Council and their technical committees to share information and develop management recommendations.



Management of Migratory Birds

Management of Migratory Birds by Administrative Flyways

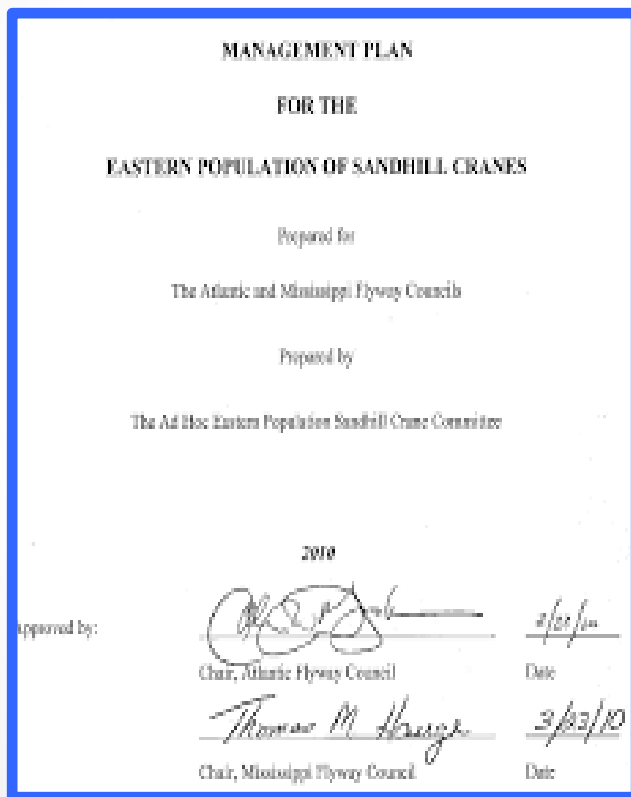


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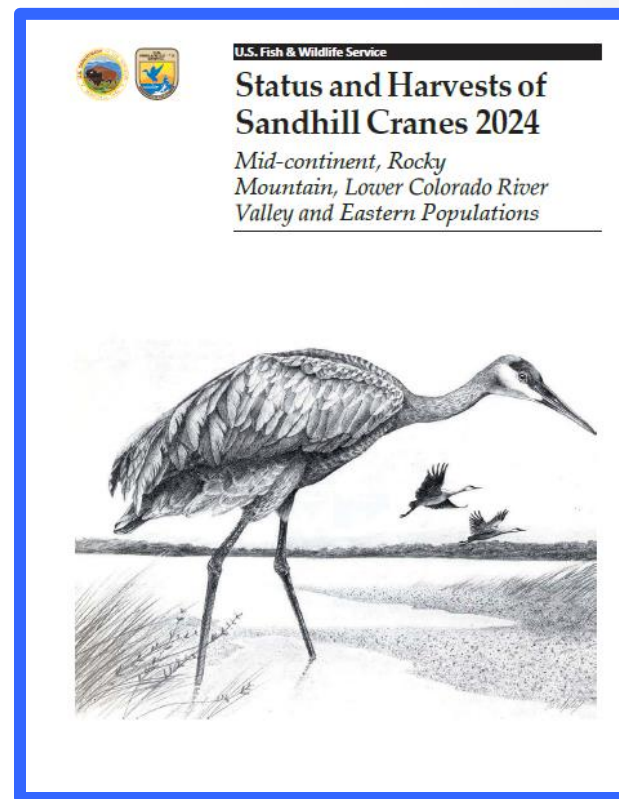


Managing Sandhill Cranes

○ Key Documents



AF & MF Management Plan, 2010



Annual Status Reports, USFWS



Steps to Approve a Hunting Season

EP Sandhill Crane Range: US portion of Atlantic & Mississippi Flyways

- **INTERNAL** – Have the authority to set a hunting season on Sandhill Cranes within your own jurisdiction
- **EXTERNAL** – Develop a Proposal consistent with the Management Plan guidance (Appendix 1) and submit for review by the Flyway Webless and Regulations Committees in both Atlantic & Mississippi Flyways
- **EXTERNAL** - Pass a Recommendation for the hunting season in both Flyways (Game Bird Technical Sections and Flyway Councils)
- **FEDERAL** – Ask the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) to approve the Recommendation. If approved, develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the State and USFWS for an experimental season with implementation requirements, annual reporting, and evaluation metrics.



Hunting Season Approval (continued)

EP Sandhill Crane Range: US portion of Atlantic & Mississippi Flyways

- **INTERNAL** – Implement the hunting season consistent with the MOA with Annual Reporting to the USFWS and Flyways
- **INTERNAL** – After 3 years of experimental hunting seasons and data collection, write up an assessment based on MOA success metrics; provide the report to the USFWS and Flyways
- **EXTERNAL** – Repeat the Flyway process if Operational Status for the Hunting Season is desired (both Atlantic & Mississippi Flyways)
- **FEDERAL** – Ask the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) to approve the Recommendation for Operational Status.



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Hypothetical WI Hunting Season

Details & Considerations - EP Sandhill Crane Management Plan

- **60 days in length, between September 1st and January 31st**
- **Hunting by Special Permit Only**
- **Follow-up Sandhill Crane Hunting & Harvest Survey required annually**
- **2018-2022 Fall Survey results for Wisconsin show mean of ~51,000 cranes ... maximum number of permits cannot exceed 10% of this abundance level (~5,100)**
- **Experimental Season Status would likely constrain maximum number of permits at a lower level**
- **Any Hunting Proposal would have to address potential Whooping Crane concerns – concentration areas, migration timing, identification requirements for hunters, etc.**



Hunting in WI – Other Considerations

Experience in Other Jurisdictions

- **Maximum number of permits for all hunting States is currently ~12,300 (12% of 102,613)**
- **Alabama, Kentucky & Tennessee have Operational Seasons in place (total of 5,950 tags)**
- **Harvest Success Rates vary from 15–25% (mean = ~ 20%)**
- **Issuance of 1,000 – 2,000 tags would likely result in a harvest of 150-500 sandhill cranes in WI**
- **Harvest Rate from last 4 years (seasons open in AL, KY & TN) has been ~1% of conservative fall flight index**



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Elements of a Hunting Proposal

Based on Appendix 1 of the EP Management Plan

- Estimated peak numbers of Sandhill Cranes and timing of their migration
- Proposed season dates, length, and any hunting zones
- Proposed permit system to allocate hunting permits and method of data collection for hunter participation and harvest
- Proposed number of permits to be issued
- Education tools and communication plans for hunters to avoid non-target species harvest (e.g., whooping cranes).
- Temporal and spatial considerations to reduce impacts to whooping cranes (warranted for Wisconsin)
- Annual post-hunting season survey to all permit holders to assess: **Days Hunted, Cranes Harvested, Dates & Location of Harvest, Unretrieved Harvest** (wounded), and **Banding data ...** use follow-up survey if response rate is <75%



Questions?

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Thank you!

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