

SUBJECT: Request adoption of Wisconsin's Double-crested Cormorant Management Plan and Population Objectives.

FOR: JANUARY **BOARD MEETING**

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Jeff Pritzl, Regional Wildlife Supervisor

SUMMARY:

The Wisconsin Cormorant Team consisting of wildlife management, endangered resources and fisheries staff recommends adoption of the following Cormorant Management Plan and Objectives for Wisconsin:

- Management objective of no more than 5,000 nests in four distinct colonies on the northern Door County Islands.
- Management objective of no more than 1,000 nests is recommended on Cat Island in lower Green Bay.
- No cormorant management is needed at this time on the Mississippi River, Lake Superior, or the interior of Wisconsin.

Department staff conducted public meetings in Sturgeon Bay, Madison, and Green Bay. Public participants submitted 74 comments on the proposed plan. 74% of those comments were either supportive or encouraged greater levels of control than proposed.

Currently, cormorant management by the DNR takes place under a USFWS Public Resources Depredation Order. If increased management is to take place, however, Wisconsin must conduct an Environmental Assessment of cormorant management. State population goals for cormorants and a management plan must be in place before the Environmental Assessment can be developed.

Double-crested cormorant numbers have expanded tremendously across North America over the previous 20 years. Most states and provinces in the Great Lakes region have found it necessary to manage cormorants due to concerns about impacts on public resources including fish stocks, co-nesting waterbird populations, and protection of unique island vegetative habitats

RECOMMENDATION: Adoption of Wisconsin's Double-crested Cormorant Management Plan and Population Objectives.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|-----|-------------------------------------|----------|
| No | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fiscal Estimate Required | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached |
| No | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Environmental Assessment or Impact Statement Required | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attached |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Background Memo | Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Attached |

APPROVED:

/s/

Bureau Director, Tom Hauge

/s/

Administrator, Laurie Osterndorf

/s/

Secretary, Matt Frank

1/2/08

Date

1/3/08

Date

1/4/08

Date

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| cc: Laurie J. Ross - AD/5 | Mike Staggs - FH/3 | Regional Wildlife Supervisors - WM/6 - 5 |
| Tim Andryk - LS/5 | Kurt Thiede - LS/5 | Tom Hauge - WM/6 |
| Signe Holtz - ER/6 | GLIFWC & Tribes - 14 - WM/6 | Reg. WM Sups. - 5 - WM/6 |
| Cons. Cong. Executive Comm. - 4 - LS/5 | Barbar Zellmer - WM/6 | Bob Manwell - CE/8 |

DATE: December 20, 2007

FILE REF: 2300

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Secretary Matthew Frank

SUBJECT: Adoption of Wisconsin's Double Crested Cormorant Population Objectives

I am requesting adoption of a Double Crested Cormorant Population Objective for Wisconsin.

Double Crested Cormorant Population Objectives:

Cormorant population status and proposed objectives for Wisconsin are broken into five geographic areas which are listed below. Currently almost 90% of the state's cormorant breeding population occurs in Lake Michigan waters associated with Green Bay and the Door Peninsula. Other than a young and growing colony on Lake Winnebago at Oshkosh, cormorant numbers in the remainder of the state are stable to declining. So recommended population control objectives are directed only at certain Lake Michigan breeding colonies at this time. Control techniques include egg oiling, nest destruction, and/or shooting cormorants. It is the position of the cormorant team that new colonies should not be allowed/encouraged in the Green Bay or Door Peninsula management areas. We also do not want to cause the abandonment of existing colony locations. Management should be directed at reducing cormorant breeding numbers without causing colony abandonment, which may increase the likelihood of cormorants pioneering new breeding sites in the area.

A. Northern Door County Islands:

- Currently 10,000 nests at 4 distinct colonies.
- Recommend an objective of 5,000 nests at 4 distinct colonies; no less than 500 nests at any one of the colonies
- Prevent DCCO nesting at any additional islands

B. Cat Island, Lower Green Bay:

- Currently 2,100 nests
- Recommend an objective of 1,000 nests on Cat Island
- Prevent DCCO nesting at any additional islands

C. Lake Superior (currently just Apostle Islands):

- Currently < 500 nests
- No population management required

D. Mississippi River:

- Currently < 20 nests
- No population management required

E. Interior Wisconsin:

- Currently 1,100 nests
- No population management required

*50% of the interior population resides at a young colony in Millers Bay on Lake Winnebago. This colony may need to be separated from the remainder of the interior population and an objective population established if resource concerns are identified.

Background information:

Department staff have held public informational meetings on Wisconsin's Double Crested Cormorant Management Plan and Objectives. These meetings were held in Sturgeon Bay, Madison, and Green Bay.

Double-crested cormorant numbers have expanded tremendously across the North American continent over the previous 20 years. This is presumably due to a reduction in exposure to environmental toxins that were interfering with reproduction, and an increase of forage fish populations in the Great Lakes Basin and aquaculture facilities in wintering areas located in the lower Mississippi River states. Most states and provinces in the Great Lakes region have found it necessary to initiate cormorant population control due to concerns about impacts on public resources including fish stocks, co-nesting waterbird populations, and protection of unique island vegetative habitats.

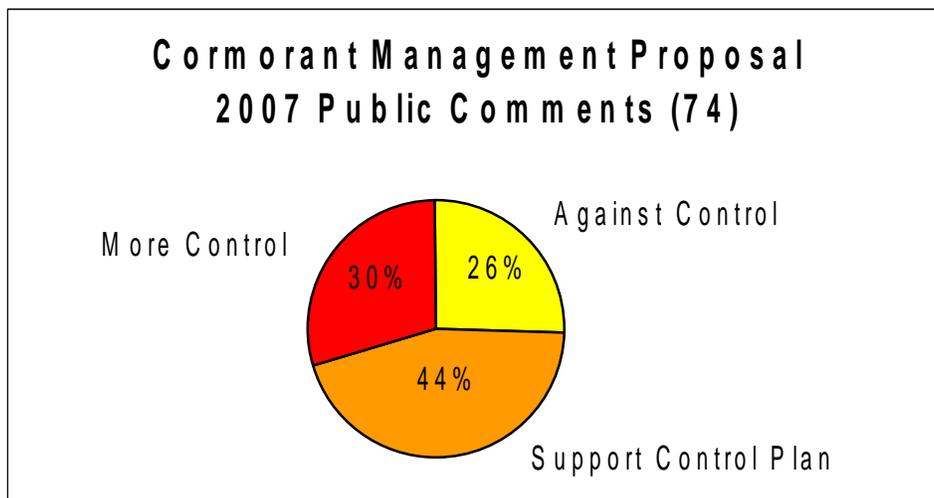
The US Fish and Wildlife Service has issued a Public Resources Depredation Order (PRDO) which allows certain federal, state, and tribal agencies to take action to control cormorants where public resource damage can be documented, and cormorant management can be shown to abate damage to the resource. Several states in the region have also conducted Environmental Assessments of cormorant management that have demonstrated a need to take more aggressive action under the USFWS PRDO. Wisconsin has not conducted this Environmental Assessment. In order to do so, Wisconsin must first establish management objectives for cormorants in Wisconsin.

Population Objectives Development:

A Wisconsin Cormorant Team consisting of DNR staff from Wildlife Management, Endangered Resources and Fisheries Management was assembled in 2002 to address the development of the USFWS PRDO, and interact with agencies and stakeholders to initiate cormorant management under the PRDO. This team has developed the proposed population objectives for Wisconsin breeding cormorants.

Public Meetings:

A comment sheet was provided to all attendees and others who were not able to make a meeting but wished to offer comments. In total, 74 comments were received. Positions relative to the draft population objectives fell into three categories.



Thirty people attended the meeting in Sturgeon Bay. The predominant opinion of the attendees was that the cormorant population must be reduced to protect the remaining islands and the fishery. They were appreciative of the control efforts to date, and generally supportive of the management objectives. In Madison, two people attended representing concerns for the future of the northern Door County islands

and supported cormorant control. One individual represented Madison Audubon Society, and later provided comments on behalf of the organization not supporting control unless further research supported a connection between cormorants and declining fish populations. At the Green Bay meeting, there were 20 people in attendance. Fishing interests were represented, and they were very critical of the lack of control to date and the suggested costs to implement control. They felt the management plan did not go far enough and essentially preferred eliminating all cormorant colonies. Also in attendance were several people concerned that the cormorant plan and general interest in control are not based on scientifically defensible information, and that the plan as written will not meet its objective and may actually have negative impacts on co-nesting colonial waterbirds, while causing cormorants to seek new nesting locations.

Response to public comments:

The DNR cormorant management team continues to support the population objectives as drafted. We acknowledge and appreciate the concerns of those who feel that control is unwarranted or that control actions will have unintended effects. We also acknowledge that some of the public support for cormorant management is based on unfounded perceptions and does not represent responsible resource stewardship.

We recognize that cormorant population management, as it is occurring throughout the Great Lakes Basin, is a relatively new conservation action and new information is learned each year. Wisconsin cormorant management should remain adaptive and seek to compliment the work going on throughout the Basin.

Environmental Analysis:

Upon approval of the final management plan, we will prepare an environmental analysis of the proposed population control actions in order to meet USFWS requirements for such actions.