

7. COMPATABILITY WITH EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

As a reintroduced endangered species, whooping cranes warrant special considerations relative to other wildlife management practices. In particular, these considerations include hunter education tools to prevent accidental whooping crane shootings and the potential impact of trapping activities on the restoration program.

7.1 HUNTING

Unregulated hunting was one of the primary reasons for the whooping crane's historic decline from colonial times until the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (Allen, 1952). Hunting whooping cranes is now illegal; in spite of that, shootings occasionally take place (Lewis et al., 1992a). Whooping cranes in the AWBP and the EMP associate with sandhill cranes during migration. As a result, whooping cranes have been accidentally shot in states of the central flyway (west of Wisconsin) during sandhill crane hunting season and during snow goose hunting in the central and Mississippi flyways. The potential also exists for hunters to misidentify a whooping crane as a tundra swan, although Wisconsin has no swan hunting season.

In the AWBP, unexplained losses during the fall and winter seasons may be the result of accidental hunting mortality that has gone unreported. The whooping crane's low reproductive potential makes it vulnerable to annual mortality increases that exceed annual reproduction. However, the illegal kill of whooping cranes during hunting is considered a small fraction of total AWBP mortality (T. Stehn, personal communication, January 2006).

While many people participate in waterfowl and other bird hunting seasons in Wisconsin, the risk of accidentally shooting a whooping crane is low. Snow goose hunting is uncommon (average harvest for 1995-2004 was 160 snow geese per year), and no hunting season exists for sandhill cranes and tundra swans.

Although sandhill crane hunting is illegal in the Mississippi and Atlantic flyways, their populations continue to increase and may someday support hunting seasons in limited areas. While restoration of the whooping crane will not preclude sandhill crane hunting in the two eastern flyways, whooping cranes need to be considered in the geography and timing of any future regulations to minimize the potential for mistaken identification. Educational programs, such as those in Texas and Kansas, could reduce the likelihood of accidental shootings in Wisconsin. For instance, in 2005, Texas Parks and Wildlife produced a DVD training tool entitled, "Be Sure before You Shoot," which includes whooping crane identification tips.

Vandalistic shootings—such as whooping cranes in Texas and Florida and trumpeter swans in Wisconsin—are an omnipresent challenge despite the best educational efforts.

7.2 TRAPPING OPTIONS TO CONTROL PREDATION

Regulated trapping is an important technique in wildlife research and an essential tool in wildlife management. The timing of trapping activities occurs when there is a low likelihood of conflicts with whooping cranes. No trappers are likely to be found in whooping crane habitat during the critical nesting and rearing periods, and most birds depart the state sometime during the month of November.

While population reduction is not a goal for most furbearer management programs, trapping predators such as the fox, raccoon, coyote, and bobcat can be an effective management tool for the protection of rare species (Northeast Furbearer Resources Technical Committee, 2001). For the whooping crane population to become self-sustaining it must be able to increase its size through reproduction. Trapping potential predators in late February and early March prior to whooping crane return may be an effective management tool to reduce nest predation. Trapping coordination is being considered near areas believed to be future nesting sites at Necedah NWR.