

A New Opportunity: Tennessee's Proposed Sandhill Crane Season

According to the biologists at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Eastern Population of Sandhill cranes has grown to huntable numbers. This is another tremendous success story for wildlife in America.

Just 20 years ago, Sandhills were severely threatened. Today, more than fifty thousand migrate down the Mississippi Flyway and Atlantic flyways. As with most large waterfowl migrating in great numbers – such as the snow goose – they can and have shown the ability to quickly decimate agricultural crops.

What has been called the “ribeye in the sky” is excellent table fare, and could now be hunt-able on a limited basis on private lands in southeast Tennessee near and adjacent to the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge where the Sandhill cranes have traditionally passed through on the course of their migration.

Tennessee's proposed season would run 60 days, concurrent with the regular waterfowl season. Approximately 700 permits will be allocated by a TWRA computerized draw, and each permit will allow the hunter to take three Sandhill cranes per permit.

Several states have existing Sandhill seasons, and many more (i.e., Kentucky) are currently considering adding limited Sandhill hunting. This is an opportunity to add another exhilarating waterfowl opportunity to our rich hunting tradition.

A decade ago, TWF was leading the charge to restore Tennessee's elk population. These days, a few lucky hunters get the opportunity each year to take one. To see a native species – once extinct here – restored to huntable numbers has been a crowning achievement for our state.

Won't you join us in making another success story a reality?

How You Can Help

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission is accepting comments from the public regarding the proposed Sandhill crane season. ***If sportsmen and women do not let their voices be heard by the commission then the TWRC probably will not approve the season.***

To date the commission has received several e-mails and letters from in and out of state anti-hunters asking that the season not be approved. It is very important to realize that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has given permission for Tennessee to pursue this Sandhill crane season and if we do not take advantage of this opportunity, this permission may not be extended in the future. If the season is not approved, this will embolden the opponents for any future effort, making future approval even more difficult and less likely.

Here is how you can help.

1. Contact your commissioner via U.S. or e-mail and tell them you support the season. Please copy TWF at mabutler@tnwf.org on your correspondence so we will be aware you sent a comment.
2. Call your commissioner personally to tell them you support the season.
3. Send a copy of your communication to the TWRA Chairman, Mr. Mike Chase.
4. Send a copy of your communication to Ed Carter, Executive Director of TWRA at ed.carter@tn.gov.
5. Tell all your friends and family to send in their letters of support to these same people.

Facts you can use—please feel free to use these facts should you need to.

1. Those people that would prevent sportsmen and women from harvesting Sandhill cranes hold an intolerant position. Sportsmen and women do not ask that birdwatchers or hikers be banned from using lands for wildlife because they disturb wildlife at the waterfowl refuges? This wildlife resources is big enough for all users to enjoy and for the population to sustain itself and continue to grow.
2. This proposed Sandhill crane season has been vetted by the best biologists within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's office of migratory bird management, the pertinent flyway councils, and experts from TWRA. An eastern Sandhill crane management plan was developed and approved and thus a high level of oversight was given to the approval to move forward with this season.
3. This story is exactly like many of the other stories of recovered wildlife species that were once or currently hunted, such as deer, turkey, elk, wood ducks, and other wildlife. Once the population is recovered regulated hunting can take place and pose no threat to the population or recreational uses such as birdwatching.
4. Sandhill cranes are classified as a game species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency which has primary oversight and regulatory authority for all migratory birds in the United States.
5. Sandhill crane hunting will take place on private lands to assist some farmers with crop depredation issues.
6. There are several other examples of where species like the sandhill crane and its cousin the whooping crane have been successfully hunted without and negative impact to non-target species. The Tundra and Trumpeter swan are one example and a better example is the Dusky Canada goose and interior Canada Geese.



Details of the proposed Sandhill crane season

- **Season Dates** – TWRA proposes a full 60-day season to run concurrent with the 2011-2012 late waterfowl season. (This coincides with the annual migration and wintering of Sandhill cranes in Tennessee.)
- **Zones** – TWRA proposes to have two Sandhill crane zones, one hunted zone and a non-hunted zone. The hunting zone is defined as that area south of Interstate 40 and east of State Highway 56. The remainder of the state will be the non-hunting zone.

(The majority of Sandhill cranes winter in SE Tennessee and TWRA wants to confine hunting to that area.)

- **Permits/Allocation** – TWRA is using the mid-winter count as our annual peak population number. The previous five year counts were as follows: 2006 = 14,158; 2007 = 14,698; 2008 = 12,945; 2009 = 20,191; 2010 = 48505. The average for this previous period is 22,099. Based on the formula in the management plan Tennessee qualifies for 2,209 permits. TWRA is requesting 2199 permits of this allotment. Permits will be distributed in Tennessee via a drawing. They will issue 733 permits valid for three cranes each totaling 2199 permits.

(It is believed that hunters will be more likely to pursue the sport for three permits but would be much less likely to gear-up to harvest only one.)

- **Reporting** – Each crane harvested will be required to be tagged and checked in via various available TWRA check-in methods. Each permit will have three accompanying temporary kill-tags. The hunter will be required to affix one of the temporary kill-tags on the crane before removing it from the field. Upon check-in, the hunter will receive a permanent kill-tag which validates their possession of the crane.

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission

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