

MICHIGAN SAYS NO TO THE HUNTING OF OUR SANDHILL CRANES!

Michigan residents do not want our state's migratory birds shot for trophies.



Sandhill cranes, Michigan's largest bird and the oldest living bird species, have been protected in the Great Lakes State since 1916 under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. With their numbers low from habitat loss and hunting, this protection was desperately needed. *But resolutions have just been introduced in the Michigan House and Senate (House Resolution 61 and Senate Resolution 30) urging an open season on our state's sandhill cranes.*

Michigan legislators and officials have used misleading information and fear-mongering to try to push for a sandhill crane hunting season. In a December 2017 hearing of the Michigan House Natural Resources Committee, Rep. James Lower showed committee members a photo of cranes surrounding a tractor and implied that they were causing crop damage on Michigan farms. But the Songbird Protection Coalition pointed out that the photo was from a USDA report showing Eurasian Cranes on a farm in Israel, who were flocking around a tractor that was feeding them to attract birdwatching tourists. And correspondence obtained through an open records search showed that a Michigan DNR official expressed support for opening a hunting season on sandhill cranes—despite the agency's claim to be neutral on the subject—and even urged NRC members to drum up support for a sandhill crane hunt from agriculture lobby groups.¹

Hunting sandhill cranes is unnecessary and serves no wildlife management purpose. Sandhill cranes are gentle birds that feed on insects, fish, and vegetation. A recreational hunting season will not “protect crops” from sandhill cranes, and such an action is not backed by sound science. A USDA report states that there is a lack of documentation to determine whether hunting or other lethal means of removing sandhill cranes would reduce crop damage.² Effective non-lethal methods and products already exist to protect certain crops planted near prime wetland habitat from coming into conflict with sandhill cranes, including the non-toxic seed coating “Avipel.” Michigan farmers can obtain permits to lethally remove individual sandhill cranes when necessary, and tribal hunts are also permitted. Additionally, a fall shooting season would not reduce any sandhill crane conflicts with crops that primarily occur in the spring.

¹ Keith Matheny, “DNR’s, lawmaker’s actions questioned in push for sandhill crane hunt.” *The Detroit Free Press*, December 12, 2017.

² Jeb Barzen and Ken Ballinger, “Sandhill and Whooping Cranes.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services, January 2017.

Significant economic value as live birds. Standing at almost five feet tall with a six- to seven-foot wingspan, these long-necked, majestic birds attract attention from admiring Michigan birdwatchers where they gather to breed on their annual migration south. Events such as Battle Creek's 21-year-old CraneFest, jointly sponsored by Michigan Audubon and Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek, continue to be popular attractions where people gather to watch this great wildlife spectacle. More people participate in wildlife watching in Michigan than in all forms of hunting combined, and nationwide, wildlife watchers outspend hunters by a nearly three to one margin.³



Hunting sandhill cranes could orphan dependent young. While sandhill crane chicks hatched in late spring are able to leave the nest within a day, it can be nine or 10 months before they are completely independent from their parents. If Michigan hunts sandhill cranes early in the fall before they migrate to their wintering grounds, either of the parents—or even the still-dependent young—could be killed.

Their population is still recovering. Studies have shown that sandhill crane populations are increasing, which may indicate a conservation success story. But the population is still far from stable. Sandhill cranes mate for life, but are slow to mature—in fact, it could take up to four years or more before their first successful breeding cycle. Even then, they lay only two eggs each breeding cycle, and it is rare that more than one of the fledglings survive. Adding hunting mortality to their already slow reproduction, combined with other common threats to survival like disease, ingestion of toxins, hailstorms, lightning, lead poisoning, predation, avian tuberculosis, and collisions with power lines, could further imperil the still-recovering population of sandhill cranes.

There are plenty of other species for hunters to pursue. At least 38 species are classified as “game” in Michigan—many of which are birds. Turkeys, pheasants, geese, ducks, woodcock, rails, snipe, and many other bird species give recreational hunters more than ample shooting opportunities at all times of the year in Michigan. In fact, hunting seasons are longer and bag limits are larger than ever for many species.



More toxic lead shot discharged into the environment. Cumulative lead deposits pose a significant risk to ground-feeding sandhill cranes and to other wildlife that directly and indirectly ingest toxic shot—including protected birds of prey such as eagles, falcons, hawks, and owls. Sandhill cranes nest on the ground and over marshes, so they can be susceptible to lead present in the environment. *The federal prohibition on the use of lead shot to hunt migratory waterfowl would not apply to sandhill cranes.*

Please call your state Representative and Senator (find at www.michiganvotes.org/Find.aspx) and ask them to vote **NO on House Resolution 61 and Senate Resolution 30, calling for the trophy hunting of Michigan's sandhill cranes!**

***The Michigan Songbird Protection Coalition** is a group of Michigan citizens, hunters, biologists, bird hobbyists, environmentalists, farmers, and animal welfare advocates, all working to prevent the hunting of our state's mourning doves and sandhill cranes. For more information, visit www.songbirdprotection.com.*



Songbird Protection Coalition

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³ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.