



International Crane  
Foundation

E-11376 Shady Lane Road  
P.O. Box 447  
Baraboo, WI 53913-0447, USA

608-356-9462  
608-356-9465 fax  
cranes@savingcranes.org  
www.savingcranes.org

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Regarding Senate Resolution 0020, “A resolution to encourage the Natural Resources Commission to add Eastern sandhill cranes to the game species list and seek U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval to establish an Eastern sandhill crane hunting season”; on behalf of the International Crane Foundation I urge you to consider and address these valid concerns before moving forward.

- There are no data to support an “explosion” of Sandhill Cranes in Michigan
- Depredation permits nor regulated hunting is not a long-term solution for crop damage by cranes; there is a scientifically proven method to reduce or eliminate crop damage incurred by cranes in spring
- The Eastern Population of Sandhill Cranes is not harvested in Minnesota; there are currently no states in the EP that allow hunting in breeding areas
- There remain multiple data needs regarding the expansion of the Sandhill Crane population before a hunting season should be considered

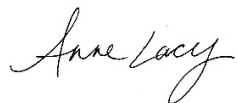
The Eastern Population (EP) of the Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) breeds across much of the upper Great Lakes region, and has been expanding (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jof.12124>). As stated in the US Fish & Wildlife Service Final report for the annual fall survey (<https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/surveys-and-data/Webless%20Migratory%20Game%20Birds/Sandhill%20crane%20pdf%20files/EasternPopulationGreaterSandhillCraneFallSurvey.pdf>), this survey is not a complete census of EP sandhill cranes, but instead serves as an index of abundance. The FWS Fall Survey data for sandhill cranes shows that the number of cranes detected in late October in MI has remained steady (median = 18,995 over 55 sites) for the years 2010 – 2020. The Resolution states that there is an “explosion” of cranes, without time frame, causing significant issues for Michigan farmers, and a hunting season would reduce the amount of nuisance cranes. US Fish & Wildlife Service data for depredation permits indicates that in 2010 depredation permits were issued in 14 MI counties, taking 243 cranes. In 2019 that number had increased to 60 counties taking at least 1428 cranes. This is more than the 1133 total cranes harvested in KY, TN, and AL during their 2019/2020 hunting seasons. Alarmingly, this accounts for over 10% of the MI population counted in the 2019 Fall Survey. This is a staggering number; this percent reduction in any given states’ population via a hunting season would not be approved as it could cause a serious decline in the resident population.

A fall sandhill hunting season will have no demonstrable benefit for farmers experiencing spring crop damage. A depredation permit costs landowners \$100 annually, and as stated in the permit itself, “a depredation permit is not considered a long-term solution”. It is apparent that neither the utilization of depredation

permits nor a hunting season would alleviate the very real issue of crop damage of newly sprouted corn by cranes in the spring. There is, however, a proven method that is available, and will give farmers the help they need. The avian deterrent chemical anthraquinone, sold commercially as Avipel (<https://avipel.com/>) has been scientifically shown to minimize or eliminate this damage (<https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.207>). Ensuring that corn growers have access to this seed treatment will nearly eliminate the issue experienced by many corn growers. The Resolution incorrectly states that this population is currently hunted in MN. While there is a season for sandhill cranes in MN, it is in the Northwest section of the state. In this area, a small number of the much more numerous Mid-Continent Population breeds, not the EP. There has been concern expressed for the hunting of Sandhills in this area of MN, as it is a breeding area. It is unknown how much of an effect a hunting season would have if breeding birds were preferentially taken in a hunting season, given the slow maturation and reproductive rates in cranes. Wetland surveys conducted from 2012 – 2016 indicated a measurable decline of breeding sandhills following the 2010 initiation of a hunting season in the NW Sandhill Zone of MN (<https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlife/research/populations/2016/04-wetland-wildlife.pdf>). This decline is of concern and could be replicated in MI, as this is an important breeding area as well.

There remain many questions about the rates of population growth and expansion of the EP Sandhill Cranes. As stated in the Priority Information Needs for Sandhill Cranes II, a better understanding of the abundance and migration of birds in this population is needed to complement the current knowledge of the distribution and migration chronology; importantly, this includes further evaluation of the adequacy of the fall survey for assessing population status ([https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/surveys-and-data/Info-Needs-Sandhill-Crane-II\\_2016.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/surveys-and-data/Info-Needs-Sandhill-Crane-II_2016.pdf)). This must be accomplished before a hunting season is considered in Michigan, a breeding area for Sandhill Cranes.

Thank you,



**Anne Lacy**

She/her/hers

*Senior Manager – North America Programs*

**INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION**

E11376 Shady Lane Rd. | P.O. Box 447

Baraboo, WI 53913 USA [savingcranes.org](http://savingcranes.org)

Office: 608-356-9462 ext.146 **cell 608-219-6952**

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