



October 19, 2018

To the Ontario Waterfowl Advisory Committee,

Subject: Proposal to establish a sandhill crane hunting season in Ontario.

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), its 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 740 member clubs, and Delta Waterfowl, and its 60,000 members, we respectfully request that the Canadian Wildlife Service begin the process to establish a hunting season for sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) in Ontario. Our members have expressed interest in this hunt repeatedly over the years. In addition, support for a sandhill crane hunt has been voiced by the agricultural community, the Manitoulin Area Stewardship Council, the Kirkland District Game and Fish Protective Association, the St. Joseph Island Hunters and Anglers Association Inc., and MP Carol Hughes (Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing).

Eastern Population (EP) sandhill cranes are hunted in three U.S. jurisdictions; Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The population is currently above the upper population objective (60,000) laid out in the *Management Plan for Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes*, with a three-year average estimated population of 86,969 birds.

In the US, EP sandhill cranes are hunted under a permit system to prevent overharvest; however, it is our understanding that a permit system is likely not feasible in Canada. To prevent overharvest of cranes in Ontario, a new hunting season structure should err on the side of caution in terms of bag/possession limits. We envision an Ontario hunt conforming to the strict monitoring stipulated in the management plan prepared by the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyway Councils to assess hunter participation and success, which will allow the refinement of season timing and limits based on Ontario-specific data.

Both OFAH and Delta are in the process of engaging with our members to gauge interest and solicit feedback on the potential structure of a sandhill crane hunt. We have jointly prepared the following draft structure to generate discussion and solicit feedback from hunters to help inform and guide the creation of the formal proposal.

### **Potential Ontario Sandhill Crane Hunting Season**

*Hunting area: Province-wide*

- Most Ontario-based scientific research has been conducted along the north shore of Lake Huron and on Manitoulin Island; however, sandhill cranes have been observed throughout the province with the vast majority belonging to the same Eastern Population.

*Bag Limit: Two bird daily bag and four bird possession*

- These are conservative limits based on the fact that both hunter participation and success rate are not known for Ontario. We suggest 2 and 4 as we feel that allowing hunters to only harvest a single bird on a single outing would not meet the current level of hunter interest and would not justify hunters travelling to hunt cranes or investing in decoys, calls, etc.

*Season length: 60 days beginning with opening day of geese within a waterfowl district.*

- Initial feedback from hunters indicates that the timing of sandhill crane migration throughout the province varies significantly. Having a broad season coupled with conservative harvest limits will maximize opportunity while simplifying regulations and preventing overharvest.

A healthy and sustainable sandhill crane population, combined with the conservation harvest limits outlined above, presents an excellent opportunity to generate sustainable migratory bird hunting opportunities in Ontario.

Yours in Conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Munro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Keith Munro, M.Sc.

Wildlife Biologist, OFAH

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Fisher". The signature is cursive and stylized, with a large, looped "F".

Jim Fisher, M.N.R.M.

Director of Conservation Policy, Delta Waterfowl