

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

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Caroline Ladanowski
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Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Government of Canada
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Dear Caroline:

Subject: OFAH Migratory Bird Priorities

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. In advance of the October 15, 2021 meeting of the Ontario Waterfowl Advisory Committee, we would like to reiterate the OFAH's top three priorities related to migratory birds in order to ensure they are considered as part of the development of the next regulatory cycle.

Establishing a Sandhill Crane Hunting Season in Ontario

A long-standing priority of the OFAH has been the establishment of a Sandhill Crane hunting season in Ontario. As the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) is aware, the majority of Ontario's cranes are part of the Eastern Population which is currently well above its objective of 30,000 cranes. According to Seamans (2021), this population continues to grow with an annual rate of 4.4% and a three-year (2018-2020) fall count average of 94,048 cranes. While not a direct population estimate, the fall count likely represents a conservative estimate of the number of cranes in the Eastern Population (Seamans, 2021). What is evident is that the Eastern Population represents a conservation success story, having effectively rebounded from near extirpation in the late 1800s.

The *Management Plan for the Eastern Population of Sandhill Cranes*, prepared by the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways Councils, lays out clear recommendations for actions associated with the establishment of a hunting season, chief among which are the need for additional monitoring and a mechanism for limiting harvest (e.g., a permit system). While adherence to the *Management Plan* is not strictly required to establish an Ontario season, the OFAH does see the value in a permit system to both ensure a sustainable harvest and provide the needed funding to support the recommended additional monitoring. We are pleased that CWS is currently exploring the feasibility of a permit system and feel that such a system will support the management of not only Sandhill Cranes but also Tundra Swans in the Prairies and Common Murres in the Maritimes. Furthermore, having a permit system as an additional tool for managing migratory birds in Canada may allow for its application to other species, ultimately resulting in more effective management and expanded hunting opportunities.

Given the size of this population relative to its objective and the fact that these same birds are currently subject to hunter harvest when in Alabama (since 2019), Tennessee (since 2013), and Kentucky (since 2011), we feel that an Ontario season would support both sustainable hunting opportunities and the long-term conservation of the Eastern Population through greater public awareness and appreciation, increased funding, and expanded management attention.

Removing Mute Swans from the Migratory Bird Convention Act

In 2018, the OFAH and Delta Waterfowl jointly proposed the removal of Mute Swans from the Migratory Bird Convention Act (MBCA) on the basis that they are invasive, harmful to native species and ecosystems, expanding their population size and range, and do not meet the criteria for listing under the MBCA. Furthermore, the 2004 removal of Mute Swans from the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the ongoing implementation of the Atlantic Flyway's 2003 *Mute Swan Management Plan* through Mute Swan control programs in several American states means that Canada is now out of step with our key conservation partners in the Great Lakes. While we recognize that Mute Swan control is a contentious issue due to the charismatic and photogenic nature of these birds, the reality is that they represent a documented conservation threat. Mute Swans are currently difficult to manage due to the protections afforded to them by the MBCA. Managers and landowners must obtain a damage and danger permit which adds a barrier for management that is unnecessary and inappropriate for an invasive species. This barrier is deterring needed management, thereby increasing the ecological damages caused by Mute Swans. As a result, we respectfully reiterate our request that CWS begin the process to remove Mute Swans from the MBCA.

Modernizing the Migratory Bird Regulations

Thank you for your June 30, 2021, email update on the modernization of the Migratory Bird Regulations. We provided extensive comments as part of the consultation processes in 2014 and 2019, and we are generally supportive as we saw positive benefits for both hunters and the conservation of migratory birds. We are looking forward to the implementation of the proposed changes, taking our past comments into consideration. We urge the government of Canada to make this a priority for publication in the Canada Gazette.

Thank you for taking the time to review our priorities for migratory bird management in Ontario.

Yours in Conservation,



Matt DeMille
 Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services

MD/jb

- cc: Jack Hughes, Canadian Wildlife Service
 Brigitte Collins, Canadian Wildlife Service
 Ontario Waterfowl Advisory Committee
 OFAH Board of Directors
 OFAH Small Game/Migratory Birds/Wetlands Advisory Committee
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References

Seamans, M.E. 2021. Status and harvests of sandhill cranes: Mid-Continent, Rocky Mountain, Lower Colorado River Valley and Eastern Populations. Administrative Report, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lakewood, Colorado. 16pp + tables and figures.