



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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This has been a busy month for whooping crane activity since our last report. Aransas National Wildlife Refuge has received an additional 0.72 inches of precipitation and salinity levels remain higher than ideal. We have continued to help alleviate the low food resources by adding to our prescribed burn totals. This week alone we have burned an additional 4682 acres of whooping crane habitat. Biologists observed the whooping cranes eating roasted acorns and are seeing continued usage.

The chick carcass that was sent to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI last month had inconclusive findings on the intermittent report and we are awaiting the final report, which will include virology results.

The latest data from Texas Parks and Wildlife officials indicate that red tide is still persisting in the bays but in lower concentrations. Biologists continue to keep a vigilant watch for signs of illness or disease.

Refuge biologists conducted an auto survey on the Blackjack peninsula on December 22, 2011 and observed 45 whooping cranes using upland and marsh communities. In addition, aerial survey flights to estimate the whooping crane population on wintering grounds has been scheduled the week of January 23rd with the office of Migratory Birds within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The surveys will consist of 3 consecutive flights to increase the accuracy of the population estimate. We will post an update when biologists process the flight data.

Whooping cranes observed at the refuge have bright white feathers indicating their overall body condition is good. Despite potential threats this winter, whooping cranes continue to thrive and managers are doing everything possible to ensure their continued success.



Photos courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.