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***** **News Highlight** *****

**U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator
Tom Stehn Retires**



U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator Tom Stehn (left) has retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Pictured with Tom is Jim Lewis, the previous Coordinator and now WCCA Treasurer. The photo was taken on the wintering grounds March 2003 on a WCCA field trip. ****Photo by Marty Folk****

WHOOPING CRANES OF THE WOOD BUFFALO/ARANSAS FLOCK

October 2010 – August 2011

The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population (AWBP) of whooping cranes rebounded from 263 in the spring of 2010 to 279 in the spring, 2011. With approximately 37 chicks fledged from a record 75 nests in August 2011, the flock size should reach record levels of around 300 this fall. Threats to the flock in Texas including land development, reduced freshwater inflows, the spread of black mangrove, the long-term decline of blue crab populations, sea level rise, land subsidence, and wind farm and power line construction in the migration corridor all continue to be important issues.

Twelve whooping crane juveniles were captured in Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) in August 2011, bringing the total number of radioed birds to 23. Crews visited migration stopover sites to gather habitat use data. This project is being carried out by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) with partners including The Crane Trust, Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others. It is funded by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, The Crane Trust, and the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. The tracking is the first done on the AWBP in 25 years and is a top research priority of the Whooping Crane Recovery Team! Since the 1950s, 525 AWBP whooping cranes have died with only 50 carcasses recovered, and approximate cause of death was determined in only 38 instances. It is imperative that we learn more about whooping crane mortality.

Based on opportunistic sightings, the Cooperative Whooping Crane Tracking Project documented 79 confirmed sightings of whooping cranes in the U.S. Central Flyway during fall, 2010 and 49 sightings in spring, 2011.

Ten captive-raised whooping cranes were released in February, 2011 at White Lake, Louisiana where a non-migratory flock had resided up until 1950. Seven of the birds were alive after the first seven months of the project.

Production in the wild from reintroduced flocks in 2011 was again very disappointing with no chicks fledged in Florida or Wisconsin. Incubation behavior in Florida and nest abandonment in Wisconsin continued to be the focus of research. Data collected so far in Wisconsin indicates that swarms of black flies play some kind of role in a majority of nest abandonments.

The captive flocks had a good production season in 2011. Approximately 17 chicks were raised in captivity for the non-migratory flock in Louisiana, and 18 chicks are headed for Wisconsin (10 for the ultralight project at the White River marshes, and 8 for Direct Autumn Release at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge). Approximately four chicks of high genetic value were held back for the captive flocks.

Including juvenile cranes expected to be reintroduced this fall, flock sizes are estimated at 278 for the AWBP, 115 for the WI to FL flock, 20 nonmigratory birds in Florida, and 24 in Louisiana. With 162 cranes in captivity, the total of whooping cranes is 599.

In personnel actions, Dr. Mark Bidwell is the new Canadian whooping crane coordinator. U.S. whooping crane coordinator Tom Stehn will be retiring September 30, 2011 after 29 years at Aransas.*****Highlights from a report by Tom Stehn, U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator, 8/31/11*****

Grus Americana is a biannual newsletter for members of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association, a nonprofit tax exempt organization dedicated to the conservation of whooping cranes.

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WHOOPING CRANE NUMBERS IN NORTH AMERICA Aug 30, 2011

Wild Populations

	Adult	Young	Total	Adult Pairs
Aransas/Wood Buffalo	278	- ^A	278 ^A	78
Florida non-migratory	20	0	20	8
Louisiana non-migratory	7 ^B	17 ^B	24	0
Wisconsin/Florida migratory	97	18 ^C	115	17
Subtotal in the Wild	402	35	437	103

^A The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population is currently estimated at 278. In 2010, a record 74 pairs nested and fledged 49 chicks, 45 of which arrived safely at Aransas. One later died. In May 2011, a record 75 nests were located. Chicks fledged in Canada in 2011 (approximately 37) are not included in this table since the size of the AWBP is not known until the cranes migrate to Aransas in the fall.

^B Ten juveniles were transported to White Lake, Louisiana in mid-February, 2011. Two are missing and presumed dead, the third was captured and had to be euthanized due to illness. 17 juveniles are currently being raised in captivity for release in Louisiana in the fall, 2011.

^C 18 juveniles are currently being raised for release into the eastern migratory population.

Captive Populations

	Adult	Young ^A	Total	Breeding Pairs
Patuxent WRC, Maryland	73	2	75	15
International Crane Foundation, WI	35	2	37	11
Devonian Wildl. Cons.Cent./Calgary	19	0	19	6
San Antonio Zoo, Texas	7	0	7	1
Species Survival Center, Louisiana	10	0	10	2
Calgary Zoo, Alberta	2	0	2	0
Homosassa Springs Wildl State Park, FL	2	0	2	0
Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa, Florida	2	0	2	0
Jacksonville Zoo, Florida	2	0	2	0
Milwaukee County Zoo, Wisconsin	2	0	2	0
National Zoological Park, Washington D.C.	1	0	1	0
New Orleans Zoo, Louisiana	2	0	2	0
Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Park, NC	1	0	1	0
Subtotal in Captivity	158	4	162	36

^A Chicks raised in 2011 for the eastern migratory population and Louisiana flocks are listed as wild birds.

TOTALS (Wild + Captive) 437 + 162 = 599

Updates from Reintroductions

Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Flock

Winter 2010/11 and Spring 2011.—Winter distribution, including 10 ultralight-led (UL) juveniles at 2 winter release sites, was Florida (52), Kentucky (0.5), Tennessee (14), Indiana (4), Alabama (19.5), South Carolina(4), Georgia (9), and state undetermined (9; 6 of the latter not reported since spring 2010) (decimal values resulted from birds that wintered in more than one state). One 10-year-old male was removed from the population and placed in permanent captivity after reoccurring human avoidance issues in Florida.* Mortalities included 3 direct autumn-released (DAR) juveniles in southern Georgia in December and 1 female DAR juvenile and 1 adult male in Alabama in January. Those 5 mortalities are under investigation. Late spring mortalities consisted of 1 breeding pair in Adams County, Wisconsin, 1 breeding pair in Juneau County, Wisconsin, and 1 adult male on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.

Reproduction.—Twenty pairs (15 on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, 2 on State Wildlife Areas, 2 in private cranberry reservoirs in Wood and Adams Counties, and 1 in Juneau County Forest) began incubation in the core reintroduction area during April. Unlike in the previous 6 years, when all nests initiated at the beginning of the nesting season failed mainly because of desertion, 6 pairs incubated full-term and chicks hatched from the 4 nests which had fertile eggs. One of the pairs included a 2-year-old female, the youngest bird to produce an egg (infertile) so far in the project. The remaining nests were deserted in a synchronous pattern similar to previous years. Two renests occurred and both were unsuccessful. By 1 July, no chicks remained alive.

Current Population Size.— As of 8 August 2011, the Eastern Migratory Population consisted of an estimated 99 birds (51 males and 48 females) including 86 in Wisconsin, 1 in Minnesota, 1 in Michigan, 1 in Indiana, 4 at undetermined locations, and 6 long-term missing. ****Richard P. Urbanek, Necedah, Wisconsin. From Newsletter “The Unison Call Vol. 22, No. 1****

Florida Non-Migratory Whooping Crane Flock

As of 8/5/11 we monitored 20 whooping cranes (*Grus americana*) in the Florida resident population (9 males, 11 females) including 8 pairs. A first this spring was a male Florida resident whooping crane migrating north to Wisconsin with a migratory female whooping crane. Both birds were paired prior to this temporary *fling*. One can imagine that the chemistry between these 2 must have been pretty strong! Within days after arrival in Wisconsin, the Florida male returned to his mate in central Florida, having covered a total of >3,660 km, the length of 2 migrations, in a short time (a pretty athletic feat for a “non-migratory” bird!). The female in Wisconsin also returned to her mate. What will happen next winter? Stay tuned...as the Crane World Turns...

We employed video surveillance, data-logging eggs, and camera traps in our continuing nest studies. New this year was the use of camera traps at nests to document nest attendance and identify disturbances. This breeding season we studied 22 Florida sandhill crane (*G. canadensis pratensis*) nests and 7 whooping crane nests. We anticipate collecting data again in 2012 to bolster sample sizes (especially for whooping cranes) and have not begun to analyze incubation temperature (based on data-logging eggs) and incubation behavior (based on video and still photos). However, we have done some preliminary determinations of nest fate and factors associated with nest failure.

One of 22 sandhill crane nests and 3 of 7 whooping crane nests were abandoned at the time of initial nest visits by biologists. Some pairs abandoned without returning to their nest marshes so it was human disturbance, rather than equipment at nests, that caused some abandonments. Two of the abandonments of whooper nests were by the same pair, a known “sensitive” pair. Pairs (both species combined) that abandoned had longer flushing distances than those who did not abandon and this measurement may prove useful in predicting future risks of abandonment. We will be analyzing other factors associated with the abandonments to look for trends.

Six of 22 sandhill crane nests and 1 of 7 whooping crane nests failed concurrently with drying of their marshes. Wetland water levels this spring, though sufficient for nesting, were marginal.

Camera traps did not always capture activity at nests and we will be analyzing photos and video to gain an understanding of why. However, the camera traps were useful in documenting many occasions of visitors (representing disturbances or potential disturbances) to nests. These included cattle, raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), and an alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*). A whooping crane nest failed when a cow walked over the nest (Fig. 1). It is not known at what point the incubating bird left the nest and why it did not defend the nest. We know from camera trap data at sandhill crane nests that they will not abandon at approach of livestock, and instead, always defend their nests from curious or wayward cows (Fig. 2). More data will need to be collected in order to determine if this is a behavioral difference between whooping and sandhill cranes. If so, it could explain a considerable proportion of the difference in nest success between whooping and sandhill cranes in Florida. Most cranes in Florida nest on ranch land and all but one of the nests in this year's study were in actively grazed cattle pastures.

Camera traps also were useful in determining nest success because the eggs were often visible within the nests and could be seen to either hatch or not. Other useful information collected by camera traps was water levels at nests. Finally, cameras documented important behaviors of the birds at their nests, including exchange of incubation duties by a pair of whooping cranes at night. This work was funded in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. ****Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, From Newsletter "The Unison Call Vol. 22, No. 1****



Figure 1. Composite of 2 photos showing whooping crane on nest (center of photo) with mate to left, and later the cow walking over the nest.



Figure 2. Sandhill crane defends nest against Angus bull (outweighing the bird by 200 times).

Today's Trivia Question: Tom Stehn, recently retired US Whooping Crane Coordinator, enjoys several outdoor activities. What are his favorites? See page 12 for the answer.

Louisiana Non-Migratory Whooping Crane Flock

On February 16, 2011, 10 juvenile Whooping Cranes were shipped to Louisiana from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, where they had been hatched and costume, isolation-reared for release. They were transported to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area and placed in a top-netted acclimation pen. On March 14 the birds were released from the top-netted pen and took their first flight over the marshes of SW Louisiana. The birds were provided with supplemental food and 9 of them remained in the vicinity of the release pen for the next two months. One bird left the pen area almost immediately after being released and has remained separate ever since. By mid-May the group of 9 had separated into smaller groups, with most birds leaving the marsh and dispersing to other locations within the state. By early June the satellite transmitters of 2 birds had stopped functioning, with data from one indicating a likely mortality which was confirmed in late July. The second bird has not been detected and is considered missing and likely dead. A third bird was found sick on June 8th and after two weeks of treatment and a declining condition with little chance of recovery she was euthanized. As of August 10, 7 birds remain alive. ****Sara Zimorski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, From Newsletter "The Unison Call Vol. 22, No. 1****

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries News

Two Whooping Cranes Found Dead in Jefferson Davis Parish; LDWF Enforcement Division Identifies Two Juveniles as Suspects in Shooting. Oct. 11, 2011 -- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agents have identified two juveniles for their alleged role in the illegal shooting of two whooping cranes in Jefferson Davis Parish. According to an eyewitness account, two juveniles stopped on Lyons Road in between Mouton and Guidry roads south of Jennings at 3:30 p.m. on Oct. 9. The eyewitness said they shot from their truck and killed two whooping cranes. LDWF agents and biologists were notified yesterday morning, Oct. 10, and retrieved the dead birds, which were a part of LDWF's whooping crane reintroduction program. Agents were able to locate the suspected juveniles Monday night based on information from the eyewitness account.

"Losing two cranes, especially in such a thoughtless manner, is a huge setback in the department's efforts to re-establish a whooping crane population in Louisiana," said LDWF Secretary Robert Barham. "We take this careless crime very seriously." LDWF received 10 whooping cranes in February of this year from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Research Facility in Laurel, Md., and placed them in the coastal marsh of Vermilion Parish within LDWF's White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WCA). This re-introduced population, which will be annually supplemented with future cohorts, marked the first presence of whooping cranes in the wild in Louisiana since 1950.

LDWF is working cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), USGS, the International Crane Foundation and the Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to bring the species back to the state. This non-migratory flock of whooping cranes is designated as a non-essential, experimental population and is protected under state law and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

"This is a profound setback to the many people and organizations who have worked so hard to bring this magnificent bird back to Louisiana," said Cindy Dohner, Southeast Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Whooping cranes, the most endangered of all of the world's crane species, were first added to the federal status of an endangered species on March 11, 1967.

The reintroduction at White Lake WCA is part of an ongoing recovery effort coordinated by the USFWS. Historically, both a resident and migratory population of whooping cranes were present in Louisiana through the early 1940s. Whooping cranes inhabited the marshes and ridges of the state's southwest Chenier Coastal Plain, as well as the uplands of prairie terrace habitat to the north. Within this area, whooping cranes used three major habitats: tall grass prairie, freshwater marsh, and brackish/salt marsh. The Louisiana crane population was not able to withstand the pressure of human encroachment, primarily the conversion of nesting habitat to agricultural acreage, as well as hunting and specimen collection, which also occurred across North America. The last bird in southwest Louisiana was removed to a sanctuary in 1950.

The only self-sustaining wild population of whooping cranes migrates between Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories of Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. Like those in the eastern migratory population, it remains vulnerable to extinction from continued loss of habitat or natural or man-made catastrophes. Multiple efforts are underway to reduce this risk and bring this bird further along its path to recovery. This includes increasing populations in the wild, ongoing efforts to establish a migratory population in the eastern United States, and establishing a resident population in Louisiana.

There are about 570 whooping cranes left in the world, only 400 in the wild. About 100 cranes are in the eastern migratory population. For the 11th time in as many years, ultralight-led captive reared whooping cranes are learning their migration route to wintering sites in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge. Ten young whooping cranes began their journey on Oct. 9, 2011. For more information, contact Adam Einck at aeinck@wlf.la.gov or 225-765-2465, or Bo Boehringer at bboehringer@wlf.la.gov or 225-765-5115.

USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Whooping Crane Report

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (USGS) in Laurel, Maryland, had one of its most successful years ever for rearing Whooping Cranes. A total of 32 Whooping Crane chicks were hatched, exceeding our previous records of 27 (2008) and 31 (2009 and 2010). We hatched 11 Whooping Crane chicks for the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) reintroduction program. These birds were trained at Patuxent to follow costumed people and ultralight aircraft. Both Patuxent and Operation Migration shared the job of rearing these 11 Whooping Crane chicks. Ten of the chicks were shipped to Wisconsin on June 28, 2011. The eleventh chick remained at Patuxent, not for any medical issue, but because the chick did not get along with the other 10 Whooping Crane chicks in the group. In fact, this chick was quite aggressive toward the other chicks.

At present (August 12), the remaining chicks are being costume-reared for release in Louisiana in early winter, probably December, but no actual date has been set. This group now includes the dropout from the ultralight group, as this Whooping Crane chick has become more social and much less aggressive to his new pen mates.

Even though we successfully reared the Whooping Cranes for WCEP without any major problems or losses other than the uncooperative chick, we have not been so fortunate with the birds for Louisiana. We had to euthanize one chick that hatched with congenital glaucoma. Another chick died from disease, and a third older chick recently had to be euthanized after apparently crashing into the side of the pen during the night and luxating two cervical vertebrae resulting in partial paralysis of legs and wings that was unresponsive to treatment. So, starting with 21 whooping crane chicks for Louisiana, we have lost 3 and gained the one ultralight dropout, giving us 19 birds at the present time (mid August). This is well above the 16 hatched chicks and 12 Whooping Cranes for release that was the goal for the project this year.

Patuxent's 32 Whooping Crane chicks this year came from 4 sources. The largest number (15) of chicks came from eggs produced by the breeding flock at Patuxent. This is a 27% increase in our production in 2008 (11), but slightly under our production in 2009 (17) and 2010 (18). Still, not a bad year for Whooping Crane production by any means. Other sources of eggs for the 2011 hatch year chicks included the Calgary Zoo (3), the Audubon Zoo (5), and Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (9). We thank all these partners for contributing these fertile eggs to make this a record year for rearing Whooping Crane chicks. ****Glenn Olsen, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, From Newsletter "The Unison Call Vol. 22, No. 1****

Update on WCCA's Work with Habitat Acquisitions

The May newsletter reported on the Trustees approval to spend \$286,750 to acquire three tracts of private land currently used by whooping cranes as wintering habitat along the Texas Coast. Initially, these purchases were expected to close in summer but have been delayed.

We are partnering with The Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program and The Nature Conservancy, to purchase fee title on two tracts totaling 168 acres of freshwater and estuarine marshes, tidal mudflats, and saline uplands on Copano Bay. The total cost was estimated at \$348,800 with 25 percent (\$86,750) being WCCA's share. The owner of the tracts was not satisfied with the original land appraisal and hired another appraiser. The second appraisal was much higher. Now a third firm is conducting an appraisal in an effort to determine why there is such a cost difference between the first two appraisals. The southern unit is part of a territory that a pair and their chicks have used for several years. The northern unit is used by subadults and unpaired adult whooping cranes. We anticipate the properties will eventually be transferred into the public trust, and possibly become part of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Other protected lands in the vicinity are Goose Island State Park, the Lamar and Tatton Units of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve.

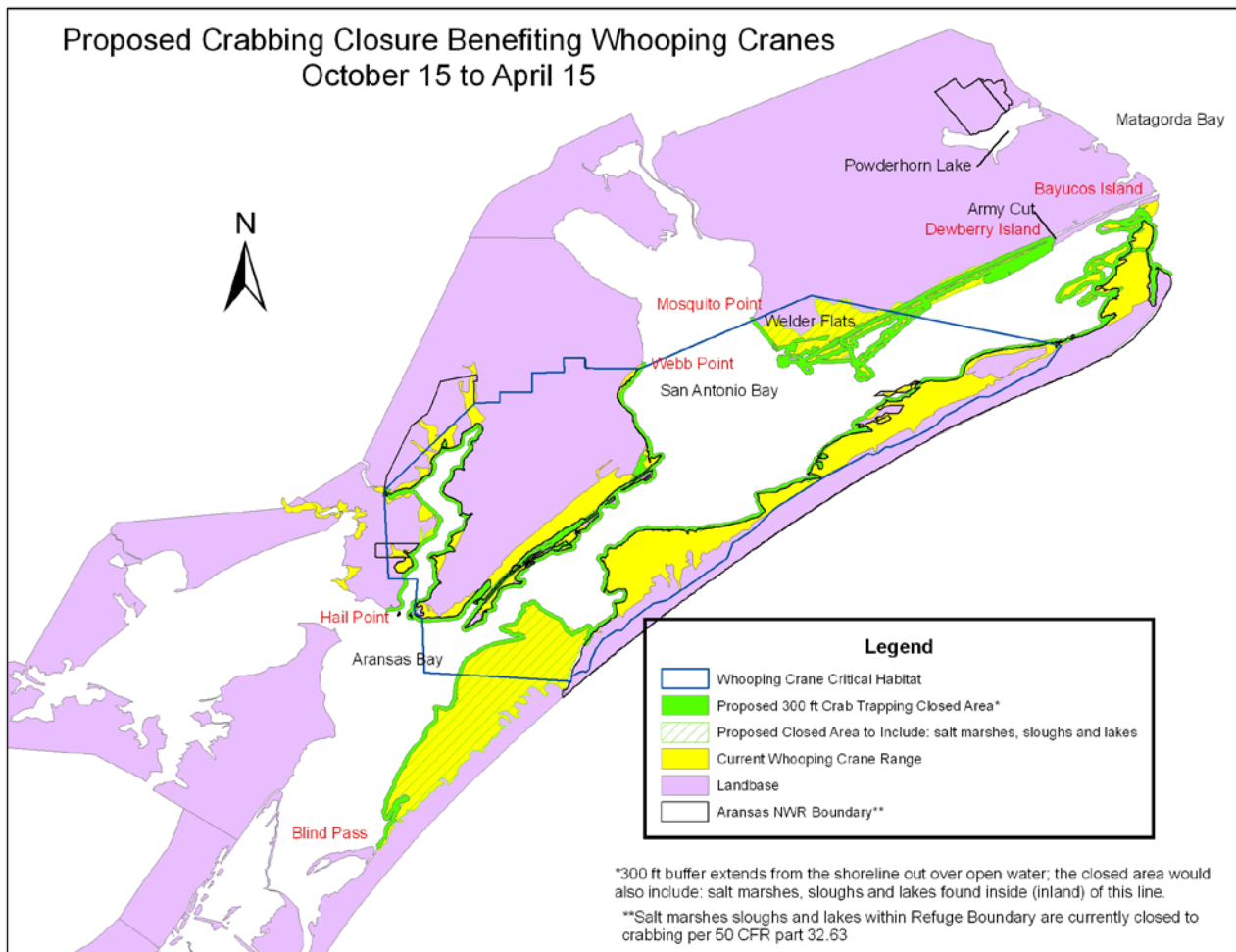
WCCA is also partnering with Nature Conservancy to acquire a conservation easement on 108.8 acres bordering San Antonio Bay. The Association’s \$200,000 contribution for the easement will be combined with other public and private funding to fulfill the total cost of \$1,050,187. The purchase is delayed until one of the partners knows what their budget allocation will be for the new fiscal year. The area is used as wintering habitat by two dozen whooping cranes often referred to as the Welder Flats population. The easement will restrict any action that would be detrimental to conservation of cranes and their habitat. Other protected crane habitats in the vicinity are Welder Flats Wildlife Management Area, Welder Flats Coastal Preserve, Guadalupe River Wildlife Management Area, and Aransas National Wildlife Area.

WCCA Sends Letter in Support of Crabbing Closure

Mr. Carter Smith, Executive Director
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744

Dear Mr. Smith,

The Whooping Crane Conservation Association (WCCA) has been working to help whooping cranes for over 60 years. Since blue crabs are the main food source for wintering whooping cranes at Aransas, we are concerned with the long-term decline of blue crabs Gulf-wide, including the Texas coast. Specifically, we urge your Department to institute a seasonal closure on blue crab harvest in areas used by wintering whooping cranes.



Map sent with letter from WCCA to recommend protection of whooping crane food resources.

In 2009, personnel of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD -Fisheries and Regulatory divisions) and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) met several times and developed a proposal to expand the crab closure zone to all marshes currently being used by wintering whooping cranes. Also proposed was a closure 300 feet out from the marshes in the shallow parts of the bays where whooping cranes may forage. With crabbing currently prohibited on Aransas and Matagorda Island NWRs, the proposal would affect marshes on San Jose Island, Welder Flats and Lamar as well as bay edges throughout the crane area. This proposal would increase availability of blue crabs for wintering whooping cranes, reduce disturbance to the cranes, and would reduce the problem of traps being abandoned in the shallow marshes. The proposed closure would be seasonal in nature only for when the cranes are on the Texas Coast from October 15th through April 15th. Your Department wanted to collect additional information on exactly how many licensed crab fisherman would be impacted, but this was never completed. TPWD personnel subsequently decided not to present this matter to your Commission, and the proposal was dropped.

The WCCA requests that TPWD re-consider this matter and bring it before the Commission. The closure would impact only a handful of commercial crabbers; it would reduce the problem of crab traps being placed in the shallow marshes and later abandoned when tides become too low to check traps; and it would signal the Department's concern about the blue crab resource and the endangered whooping crane. In 2009, the Aransas NWR began to enforce a closure of the crab fishery on Matagorda Island. A similar move by TPWD for the crane areas including San Jose Island, Welder Flats and Lamar would benefit whooping cranes by increasing their food supply. It makes little sense to be trapping crabs during the whooping crane season (October 15 to April 15) since low tides during the winter make most of the marshes and bay shorelines inaccessible with fisherman unable to access traps. A seasonal closure would also reduce disturbance to whooping cranes, an issue of increasing concern as more and more people are able to access even the shallowest of marshes with kayaks and airboats.

A map of the seasonal proposed closure as discussed in 2009 is attached. We urge your Department to bring this matter to your commission for passage.

Sincerely,
Lorne Scott
President
Whooping Crane Conservation Association

Whooping Crane Coordinator Tom Stehn Retires

Saturday, September 10th, 2011



Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be retiring on September 30, 2011. Tom has been an outstanding Coordinator for the Whooping Crane program. He has always worked with all interests including the Whooping Crane Conservation Association. Always at the ready to answer emails and telephone calls and serve as a speaker at our programs, Tom has served us and all others exceptionally well. Tom is from the old school and knows and appreciates the role of private conservation groups. We could ask for no better. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could ask for no better. We will miss Tom but wish him the best in retirement.

I asked Tom to give us a final message...“My news from Aransas is that I am going to retire September 30th! I feel so lucky to have been able to have such a rewarding career and work with such wonderful people. After 29 years at Aransas doing crane work and 32+ years federal service, it’s time for a change, whatever the future may bring. We’ll stay in Aransas Pass on the Texas coast since my wife will continue her solo practice as a family physician. I’ll be windsurfing daily and planning trips to the mountains to do more hiking. It is likely that an acting whooping crane coordinator will be appointed to carry on the program. Refuge Biologist Brad Strobel will lead the whooping crane monitoring program at Aransas.”--Tom Stehn.

****Chester McConnell, WCCA, from our web site <http://whoopingcrane.com>****

Answer to Today’s Trivia Question from page 6: In his retirement, Tom Stehn plans to enjoy more of his favorite outdoor activities: wind-surfing, hiking, and skiing (see below). Of these, wind-surfing no doubt is his favorite!



Tom Stehn (center) skiing with Clint Moore (left) and Brian Johns (right).*Photo by Marty Folk*****

Getting to know Lorraine Grassano, WCCA Trustee Emeritus

Lorraine Grassano is a craniac, a naturalist, a volunteer, and an author. She has had a 45 year love affair with whooping cranes, relating that, “When I was 15 years old, I was babysitting and came across Faith McNulty’s book: *The Whooping Crane: the bird that defies extinction*. And never forgot it!”

Born in Paterson, New Jersey she migrated to San Francisco in 1978. Lorraine describes herself as “12 years old with 48 years of experience”. Her hobbies include, “Bird Watching, Lucid Dreaming, Creative Writing, Photography, and Science Fiction.

She saw her first whooping crane in 1987 at Bosque Del Apache NWR in New Mexico and claims her most “wonderful experience in WCCA was when she had the privilege of flying over the Whooping Crane nests in Wood Buffalo National Park in 2001.” Loraine served as a Trustee of the WCCA for five years and has attended many of our meetings over the years. As a member of the International Crane Foundation she traveled to Bhutan(1999) and Cuba(1998) as a “Crane Ambassador.”

Her volunteer work as a naturalist concentrating on children includes stents at Tiburon Audubon, Marty Griffin Reserve, and the Stow Lake Education Project. She enjoys performing environmental/political raps with a raven puppet.

Currently, and for the past 22 years, Lorraine has done pro bono editing/proofreading for the Dream Network Journal and as an author she is working on a memoir called *AGAIN* which she describes as, “taking place in the 70s, when my love of “wildlife” meant something else entirely!

Lorraine graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in Journalism and has had a life time of interesting jobs – in her own words, “everything from answering Santa Clause mail to guiding tourists and guarding pinball machines, to delivering eyeballs on ice, but ended up sticking it out for almost 20 years in the Civil Service as a Park Patrol Officer for the City and County of San Francisco.” She retired in 2001 and lives in San Francisco.
****Walt Sturgeon, WCCA Trustee****

Getting to Know Chester McConnell, WCCA Trustee Emeritus

Chester McConnell spent most of his professional career of 40 years advocating wise land use and stream projects, encouraging wetland protection, conducting wildlife research, monitoring populations and managing wildlife habitats. WCCA Trustee Larry Smith once said of Chester that, “The impact of Mr. McConnell’s work is enormous in terms of wetland policy in the southeast United States. He at times stood alone in fighting projects such as the West Tennessee Tributaries project that, if complete, would have ditched hundreds of miles of recovering rivers and drained thousands of acres of wetlands. A summary of his lifetime contributions to environmental conservation could go on for pages.”

Chester’s conservation work required spending most of his life working with government agencies, industry, private landowners, and coordinating with numerous private conservation groups. When persuasion fails to halt bad projects he works to spotlight them, he worked with the news media, other private conservation groups and agencies to help encourage beneficial changes or project abandonment. As a last resort McConnell used the legal route to help prevent projects that would damage or destroy valuable habitats.

Mr. McConnell's work has helped to save hundreds of miles of rivers and thousands of acres of wetlands from destructive channelization and dredging projects. Most recently, Mr. McConnell led the efforts to protect Black Swamp, one of the last remnants of high-quality West Tennessee Bald Cypress wetlands, from conversion to a lesser-quality duck hunting habitat.

Among the scores of awards that Chester has received perhaps the most prestigious was the 2006 National Wetlands Award for Wetland Community Leader. On that occasion Sierra Club official, James H. Baker, observed that, "What some people see as a swamp to be ditched and drained, Mr. McConnell sees as a treasure that moderates flooding and acts as a filter to protect drinking water supplies. He has worked tirelessly to not let the public or government agencies forget the values of wetlands preservation..."

Besides being a past Trustee and President of WCCA, Chester maintains WCCA's website and contributes his knowledge to our efforts to preserve whooping crane habitat. Among these efforts is our ongoing effort to preserve inflows into bays in the Gulf of Mexico that are important to habitat for whooping cranes and other wildlife. Chester received the *Appreciation Citation* from Whooping Crane Conservation Association in 2003 for substantial contributions to preservation of endangered wildlife in North America.

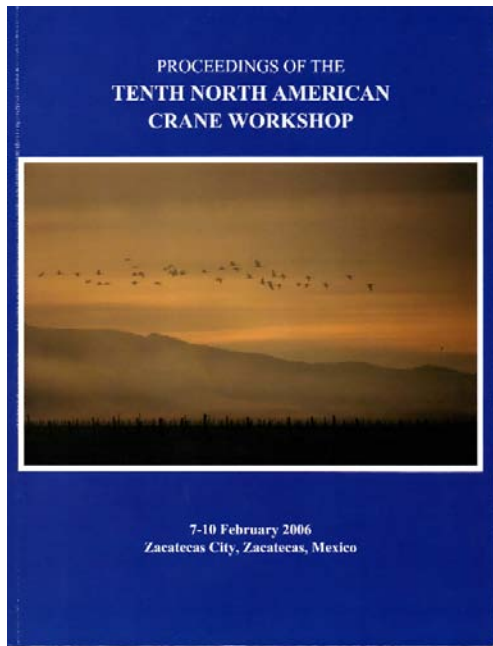
McConnell holds a Bachelor degree in biology and political science from Livingston University and a Master of Science degree in wildlife management and botany from Auburn University. From 1974 to 1999 McConnell was the Southeastern Representative for the private, nonprofit Wildlife Management Institute. His responsibilities involved nine southern states. From 1965 to 1974 he was a wildlife biologist for Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. He supervised state-wide wildlife surveys, did research on several wildlife species and managed two wildlife management areas totaling 19,000 acres. He served as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1960 to 1964 and with the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1954 to 1958.

Since retirement in 1999, McConnell has continued efforts to protect wetlands and streams with his personal resources. He and his wife Dorothy also managed their 134 acre property solely for wildlife and fish. Recently they placed their property in a Conservation Easement program with Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation so that the property will remain in its natural state in perpetuity. ****Walt Sturgeon, WCCA Trustee****

In Memoriam

Thomas E. Lewis died on June 23, 2011 in a plane crash on Elgin Air Force Base in Florida. He was 50. Also killed in the crash of the Beechcraft C24R Sierra was retired Air Force colonel David A. Miles. Thom was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist for St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge from 1992 to 2008 where he oversaw the endangered Red Wolf program. Thom was also a constant advocate for conservation of the herpetofauna on the island refuge, particularly the Gopher Tortoise and Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake. In the recently published *A Pocket Guide to the Snakes of St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge*, the dedication reads: "Dedicated to Thomas E. Lewis, who watched over the island and kept it wild." Early in his career in the 1980s, Thom, a native of Maryland, was a crane caretaker at Patuxent, and he worked on a Whooping Crane disturbance study at Aransas before joining the USFWS. [Last year, Thom coauthored an article for *The Unison Call*, "First documented wintering Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) in Delaware," vol. 21, no. 1]. More recently, he was a wildlife pilot for the USFWS, primarily involved with migratory bird programs. Thom is survived by JoAnne, his wife of over 20 years. He and JoAnne were strong supporters of the Florida Wild Mammal Association wildlife rescue facility and fostered injured and orphaned wildlife in their home. Perhaps Thom's greatest legacy is the more than 20 Red Wolf cubs (and descendants) transferred from the pack that he loved and protected to repatriation programs at other areas across the nation. The Red Wolf made history as the first U.S. species to be successfully reintroduced after extinction in the wild, and Thom's work on St. Vincent Island was pivotal to this victory. At his farewell luncheon with St. Vincent volunteers and staff in 2008 he said,

“It’s not without a heavy heart that I leave. I’ve grown to love the refuge and the volunteers. On my last day of work, I tracked the wolves on the island and I had at least five of them grouped together. I thought what a fitting way this was to spend my last day. I howled to them and four of the five howled back. So I howled again and I told them to be good and stay on the island.” **** *From Newsletter “The Unison Call Vol. 22, No. 1”* ****



Proceedings of the Tenth North American Crane Workshop Now Available On-line

The Proceedings of the Tenth North American Crane Workshop are now available for download at the following link: http://research.myfwc.com/publications/publication_info.asp?id=61384. Other editions are also available at the following websites: <http://www.savingcranes.org/digitalbooks.html> and <http://www.nacwg.org/publications.html>.

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Sandhill cranes flying to roost at sunset in Nebraska. *****Photo by Marty Folk* ****