



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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SERVICE PROPOSES TO ALLOW AQUACULTURISTS TO TAKE CORMORANTS PREYING ON FISH STOCK

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to allow catfish farmers and other aquaculturists in 33 states to take cormorants that are preying on their fish stocks.

The proposed rule, published in the June 23, 1997, *Federal Register*, would save as much as \$20 million in fish each year in the \$714 million aquaculture industry, the Service estimates. Much of the impact would be felt in the Mississippi Delta region where catfish farmers lose an estimated 3 percent to 7 percent of their inventory each year to the birds.

The order would affect all of the contiguous 48 states except Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Cormorants are long-necked, large-bodied, diving birds. Their webbed feet and hooked beaks are adapted for chasing and capturing fish under water. Because of their generally dark plumage and gregarious nature, cormorants are sometimes referred to as crows of the sea. The double-crested cormorant is the most widely distributed of the six North American species, occupying a variety of coastal and interior wetland habitats. As of 1992, it had been found breeding in 40 of the 50 United States, all 10 Canadian provinces, and in Mexico, Cuba, and the Bahamas.

The proposal would have no impact on the health of the cormorant population, which is at an all-time high of 1 to 2 million birds and increasing at a rate of 8 percent a year.

The Service is permitted to issue special depredation orders for specific species of migratory birds to address particular problems under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which generally prohibits take of migratory birds except for game birds during regulated hunting seasons.

The public may comment in writing on the proposed rule until August 23, 1997. Comments should be sent to: Chief, Migratory Bird Management Office, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop 634, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

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