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News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Whooping Cranes Arriving Soon at St. Marks NWR!

The weather has been too cold for most of us to spend much time outside, but it hasn't stopped the 20 young whooping cranes, migrating south. They have traveled 75 days and over 1,000 miles from Wisconsin, leaving their summer home on October 23. Braving the chilly arctic air, the intrepid birds and the shivering pilots in the four ultralights flew the last three days, skipping a stop each day, to land today in Decatur County, Georgia. They have only one more flight to make to reach Jefferson County, Florida. There, the flock will be split into two groups of 10 birds. Half will travel to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and half will travel to Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge to spend the winter.

There are only about 350 whooping cranes in the wild and to view these magnificent birds is a special treat, even if you are not a hardcore birdwatcher. Folks will be able to view the 10 cranes and the ultralights at a flyover event to be staged in the town of St. Marks, Florida on the shores of the beautiful St. Marks River. The exact date is unknown, but refuge staff are guessing Tuesday or Wednesday, January 12 or 13. If you are interested in participating, please keep an eye on media reports and the website operationmigration.org. Plan on arriving at the flyover site in St. Marks around 6 am and hope that the flyover will occur around 7:30 am. Last year, due to excited young cranes wanting to fly straight towards the lighthouse, the flyover actually occurred around 8:30 am. Temperatures will be cold, so please dress accordingly. The St. Marks Volunteer Fire Department will have donuts and hot drinks and Operation Migration and the St. Marks Refuge Association will have wonderful crane clothing and books to sell and friendly volunteers will gladly answer all your whooping crane questions.

"The response and support from our community last year was amazing – a record attendance of some 2,000 people for a first year flyover," says Refuge Manager Terry Peacock. "The St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is excited to be a part of this incredible project to restore a flock of whooping cranes to the eastern United States."

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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.

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