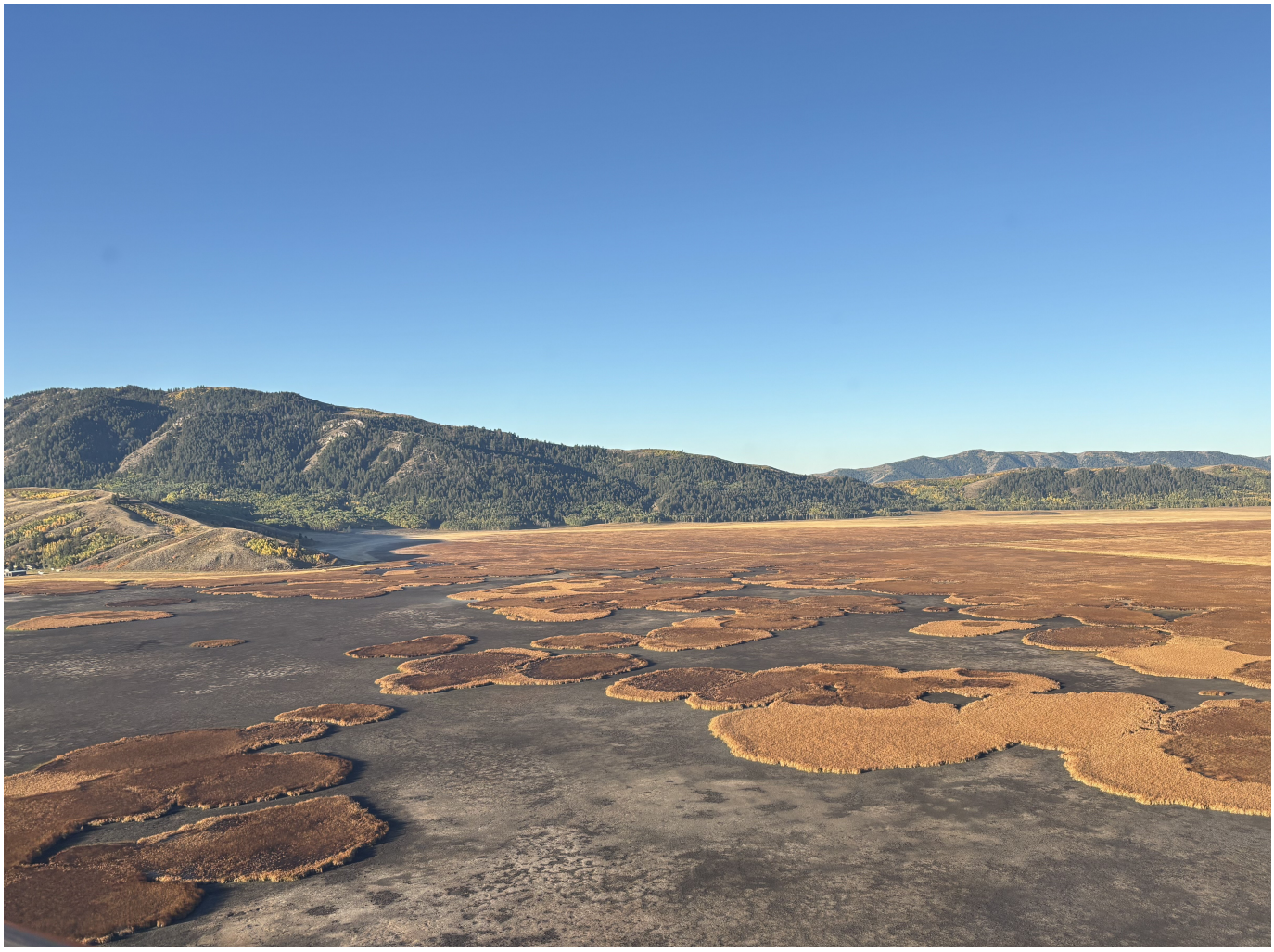
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Rocky Mountain Population of Sandhill Cranes

Population Status, 2025



Fall Population Survey of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes, 2025

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Migratory Bird Management
Branch of Migratory Bird Surveys
11924 Corporate Way
Broomfield, CO 80021

January 2026

Cover photograph: Drought conditions at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Wayan, Idaho.

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This report contains data tables and charts that may be large and complex. Readers that may need assistance reading and interpreting the data, or that may need data presented in an alternative format to facilitate reading and interpretation, should email the author at phil_thorpe@fws.gov.

Fall Population Survey of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes, 2025

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Abstract: In September 2025, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) coordinated the fall population survey of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of Greater sandhill cranes across staging areas in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. A total of 25,316 cranes were counted at 89 survey sites, with the highest concentrations observed in Montana and Idaho. Despite widespread drought and above normal temperatures across the region, the 2025 RMP crane population estimate was the third-highest total recorded in the survey's history.

Greater sandhill cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) were counted at fall pre-migration staging areas in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming during September 2025. Migrants that had arrived at RMP migration stopover areas near Jensen, Utah and in the San Luis Valley, Colorado were also recorded. The cooperative survey was organized by the Pacific Flyway Subcommittee on RMP of Greater Sandhill Cranes and the FWS. The FWS, Division of Migratory Bird Management (DMBM), Denver, provided a Daher Kodiak aircraft for a portion of the survey. Aerial and ground surveys were conducted by personnel from respective state agencies, FWS and volunteers (Table 1).

METHODS

The survey was conducted during the last full week in September to improve the likelihood that cranes would be in the survey area (Bunting et al., 2022; VonBank et al. 2023). It is important to note that this is a regional survey to get a population estimate of RMP sandhill cranes and individual state estimates may not reflect peak crane counts for each state during the selected survey week.

Colorado changed a survey name and added three new sub-survey areas. The Delta County survey area was renamed Gunnison River Basin and better aligns with the other Colorado survey areas that are based on river basins. The three new sub-areas have been surveyed for several years and meet the RMP management plan guidelines to survey new areas for 3 years before adding them to the official survey (Table 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We counted **25,316** RMP cranes at 89 survey areas with 36.2% in Montana, 29.8% in Idaho, 19.0% in Wyoming, 11.4% in Utah, and 3.7% in Colorado (Table 1). The total estimate was the third highest recorded for the survey (Table 2). There were six areas with estimates between 500 and 999 cranes and eight areas with estimates of 1,000 or more cranes (Table 3, Figure 1). The majority (98.9%) of survey areas were counted during the designated survey week (22-26 September) with 89.9% of the areas surveyed during the three-day target period (23-25 September) (Table 1).

Moderate to extreme drought conditions existed across the RMP survey states through the summer of 2025. Although precipitation across the RMP survey states was normal to slightly above normal in all states except Montana and Utah. Summer temperatures across the region

were above normal. These above normal temperatures offset any precipitation benefits and drought conditions continued across the Intermountain West.

Weather conditions for the FWS aerial survey were ideal for counting cranes (i.e., clear skies and calm winds) and we were able to complete the survey within the survey week. Other survey participants reported similar survey weather conditions for counting cranes. We believe that ideal weather for counting and sandhill crane groupings in traditional survey areas resulted in a reliable crane count for the 2025 survey.

We thank all who participated in the survey and especially appreciate efforts made to complete counts during the designated period.

LITERATURE CITED

Bunting, D. P., M. A. Boggie, D. P. Collins, P. P. Thorpe, and J. P. Donnelly. 2022. "Linking Ecological Processes and Animal Movements to Inform Timing of Long-term Surveys of a Migratory Game Bird." Ecosphere. 2022;13:e4298 https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.4298

VonBank, J.A., D.P. Collins, K.S. Ellis, J.P. Donnelly, and J.M. Knetter. 2023. Movement dynamics influence population monitoring and adaptive harvest management strategies in migratory birds. Global Ecology and Conservation 48: e02715 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2023.e02715

Table 1. Counts in September 2025 of the Rocky Mountain Population of greater sandhill cranes at premigration staging and migration stopover areas in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Surveys were conducted by air (a) and ground (g) between 19-26 September.

Map No. & Location	No. Cranes	Date		Source
COLORADO				
1 **Yampa River**	**290**			
Axial Basin	*0*	9/23	(g)	B. Holmes, CPW
County Line grain fields	*0*	9/24	(g)	L. Miller, CPW
Craig vicinity fields	*95*	9/24&26	(g)	B. Holmes, CPW, S. Schwolert, CPW, E. Jones, CPW, J. Lamb, CPW, J. Goncalves, CPW
Hayden airport/racetrack	*113*	9/24	(g)	L. Rossi, CPW
Morgan Bottoms	*0*	9/24	(g)	K. Bond, CPW
Yampa River SWA	*82*	9/24	(g)	L. Miller, CPW
2 **Elk River**	**0**			
Selby's grain fields	*0*	9/24	(g)	D. Rehak Suma, CPW
3 **White River**	**156**			
West of Meeker - Powell Park	*0*	9/24	(g)	M. Taylor, CPW
E. of Meeker - Irish Mesa/Agency Park	*156*	9/23	(g)	B. Holmes, CPW, M. Taylor, CPW
4 **Williams Fork River**				
East of Hamilton	**no survey**			
5 **Little Snake River**	**0**			
Slater	**no survey**			
Two Bar Ranch	*0*	9/24	(g)	B. de Vergie, CPW
6 **Gunnison River Basin**	**70**			
Harts Basin/Fruitgrowers Vicinity	*31*	9/24	(g)	E. Phillips, CPW
Gunnison River, west of Delta	*2*	9/24	(g)	A. Kircher, CPW
Uncompahgre Valley	*37*	9/24	(g)	Z. Weaver, CPW
California Mesa/Spring Creek Mesa	*0*	9/24	(g)	K. Crane, CPW, S. Sinclair, CPW, B. Hildebrand, CPW

Table 1. Continued.

Map No. & Location	No. Cranes	Date		Source
7 **San Luis Valley**	**409**	9/25	(g)	J. Gammonley, CPW
Subtotal	**925**	3.7% of total estimate		
IDAHO				
1 **American Falls Res.**	**297**	9/22	(a)	FWS survey[a]
2 **Ashton-St. Anthony**	**230**	9/22	(a)	"
3 **Bear River Valley**	**1,700**			
Bear Lake Valley	*1,299*	9/24	(g)	D. Lachman, J. Smith, J. Jirak, L. Boyer-Rosales, FWS
Border-Pegram	*2*	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
Bennington-Soda Spr.	*35*	9/24	(a)	"
Grace-Thatcher	*28*	9/24	(a)	"
Thomas Fork	*336*	9/24	(a)	" " "
4 **Blackfoot Res.**	**385**	9/25	(a)	" "
5 **Camas NWR**	**313**	9/22	(a)	" "
6 **Camas Prairie**	**No Survey**			"
7 **Carey Lake area**	**No Survey**			"
8 **Chesterfield Res.**	**129**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
9 **Grays Lake NWR**	**6**	9/22	(g)	B. Bajakian, D. Duran, R. Patrick, FWS
10 **Henrys Lake Flats**	**0**	9/26	(a)	FWS survey
11 **Henry's Fork/Snake R. confluence**	**681**	9/24	(g)	J. Rydalch, IDFG
12 **Island Park Res.**	**0**	9/22	(a)	FWS survey
13 **Market Lake WMA**	**0**	9/25	(g)	B. Gullett, S. Upton, IDFG
14 **Marsh Valley**	**155**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
15 **Mud Lake WMA**	**438**	9/24	(g)	B. Panting, IDFG
16 **Oxford Slough-Swan Lake**	**282**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
17 **Silver Creek**	**401**	9/26	(g)	L. Burman, M. Wampler, IDFG
18 **Teton Basin**	**1,265**	9/25	(a)	FWS survey
19 **Malad River**	**1,256**	9/24	(g)	B. Stringham, UDWR
Subtotal	**7,538**	29.8% of total estimate		

Table 1. Continued.

Map No. & Location	No. Cranes	Date		Source
MONTANA				
1 **Cascade-Ulm**	**395**	9/23	(a)	B. Skone - MFWP
2 **Centennial Valley**	**6**	9/23	(g)	K. Inman, FWS
3 **Clark Fork of the Yellowstone**	**628**	9/19	(a)	S. Stewart, MFWP
4 **Deadman's Basin**	**400**	9/23	(a)	D. Harty, MFWP
5 **Dillon-Twin Bridges**	**3,690**	9/23	(a)	FWS survey
6 **Gallatin Valley**	**377**	9/23	(g)	J. Cunningham, F. McNew, C. Gower, MFWP
7 **Helena Valley**	**386**	9/23	(a)	L. Parsons, MFWP
8 **Paradise-Shields Valleys**	**575**	9/24	(a)	M. Yarnell, MFWP
9 **Melville**	**215**	9/23	(a)	D. Harty, MFWP
10 **Musselshell River**	**992**	9/23	(a)	D. Harty, MFWP
11 **Otter Creek**	**16**	9/23	(a)	D. Harty, MFWP
12 **Teton River-Eureka Res.**	**113**	9/23	(a)	B. Skone - MFWP
13 **Toston-Townsend**	**349**	9/23	(a)	A. Grove, MFWP
14 **Upper Madison Valley**	**80**	9/23	(a)	FWS survey
15 **Warm Springs**	**384**	9/24	(g)	B. Shortman, K. Yeager, MFWP
16 **White Sulphur Spr.**	**420**	9/24	(a)	J. Kolbe, MFWP
17 **Whitehall**	**128**	9/23	(a)	FWS survey
Subtotal	**9,154**	36.2% of total estimate		
UTAH				
1 **Cache Co.**	**0**	9/25	(a)	J. Jones, UDWR
Great Salt Lake Basin				
2 **Box Elder Co.**	**603**	9/25	(g)	D. Sallee, UDWR
3 **Davis Co.**	**no survey**			
4 **Weber Co.**	**no survey**			
5 **Morgan Co.**	**2**	9/24	(g)	X. Walden, UDWR

Table 1. Continued.

Map No. & Location	No. Cranes	Date		Source
Rich Co.				
6 **Bear River Valley**	**100**	9/25	(a)	J. Jones, UDWR
7 **Round Valley**	**65**	9/25	(a)	"
8 **Summit Co.**	**40**	9/24	(g)	X. Walden, UDWR
Uintah Co.				
9 **Jensen**	**1,087**	9/25	(a)	J. Jones, UDWR
10 **Pelican Lake area**	**793**	9/25	(a)	"
11 **Leland Bench**	**0**	9/25	(a)	" "
12 **Wasatch Co.**	**no survey**			"
13 **Duchesne Co.**	**no survey**			
14 **Emery Co.**	**199**	9/24	(g)	J. Christensen, UDWR
15 **Wayne Co.**	**0**	9/23	(g)	M. Hinton, UDWR
Subtotal	**2,889**	11.4% of total estimate		
WYOMING				
1 **Baggs**	**4**	9/26	(g)	P. Damm, WGFD
2 **Bear River Valley**	**1,463**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
Big Horn Basin				
3 **Greybull River/Otto**	**38**	9/24	(a)	C. Rudd, WGFD
4 **Shoshone River/Ralston**	**209**	9/24	(a)	
5 **Worland**	**98**	9/24	(a)	" " "
Green River Basin				
6 **Big Piney-Daniel**	**141**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
7 **Bridger Valley**	**7**	9/24	(g)	A. Deru, WGFD
8 **Lonetree**	**0**	9/24	(g)	"
9 **Farson**	**1,091**	9/24	(a)	FWS survey
10 **Hams Fork**	**0**	9/24	(a)	" "
11 **Pinedale-Cora-Boulder**	**0**	9/24	(a)	Z. Wallace, WGFD "

Table 1. Continued.

Map No. & Location	No. Cranes	Date		Source
North Platte River Basin				
12 **Saratoga**	**11**	9/24	(g)	T. Cufaude, WGFD
13 **33 Mile**	**371**	9/25	(a)	C. Rudd, WGFD
Powder-Tongue River Basin				
14 **Barnum - Middle Fork Powder R.**	**4**	9/25	(a)	C. Rudd, WGFD
15 **Mayoworth - N. Fork Powder R.**	**0**	9/25	(a)	"
16 **Kaycee-Sussex**	**210**	9/25	(a)	" "
17 **Buffalo**	**0**	9/25	(a)	" "
18 **Dayton**	**399**	9/25	(a)	" "
Snake River Basin				
19 **Jackson Hole**				
Natl Elk Refuge	**0**	9/24	(g)	E. Cole, FWS
20 **Star Valley**	**122**	9/22,24	(a, g)	FWS survey, J. Bohne, WGFD retired
Wind River Basin				
21 **Hidden Valley**	**36**	9/24	(a)	C. Rudd, WGFD
22 **Ocean Lake**	**4**	9/24	(a)	"
23 **Riverview Valley**	**602**	9/24	(a)	" "
Subtotal	**4,810**	19.0% of total estimate		
TOTAL	**25,316**			

[a] Fish & Wildlife Service aerial survey flown by P. Thorpe, C. Cain and S. Catino

Table 2. September pre-migration staging area counts by state of the Rocky Mountain Population of greater sandhill cranes during 1987, 1992, 1995-2005, 2007-2025.

Year	Colorado[a]	Idaho	Montana	Utah	Wyoming	Total
1987	1,443	10,686	1,447	1,578	2,327	17,481
1992	3,181	5,801	5,264	2,810	2,248	19,304
1995	2,284	6,864	3,681	1,528	1,671	16,028
1996	1,255	8,334	2,974	1,849	2,526	16,938
1997	1,604	8,132	3,595	2,450	2,255	18,036
1998	1,273	8,067	3,415	2,185	3,162	18,102
1999	1,102	8,761	3,141	2,292	4,205	19,501
2000	749	9,337	3,598	2,416	3,890	19,990
2001	666	7,160	4,585	1,522	2,626	16,559
2002	1,355	7,698	4,843	1,869	3,038	18,803
2003	745	7,822	4,964	2,546	3,446	19,523
2004	1,410	7,152	4,637	2,239	3,072	18,510
2005	1,052	7,668	5,588	2,646	3,911	20,865
2007	1,743	8,262	6,509	2,401	3,907	22,822
2008	1,080	6,123	6,419	3,708	3,826	21,156
2009	1,162	6,934	6,329	2,283	3,613	20,321
2010	985	5,776	7,335	3,242	3,726	21,064
2011	1,347	5,029	6,642	1,498	2,978	17,494
2012	413	3,432	5,876	2,109	3,587	15,417
2013	1,594	5,228	7,218	2,732	3,588	20,360
2014	1,258	6,064	6,555	2,783	3,008	19,668
2015	1,089	6,454	9,493	3,698	3,596	24,330
2016[b]	1,135	5,445	7,507	3,298	4,879	22,264
2017	1,658	4,066	7,149	2,994	3,725	19,592
2018	1,908	4,469	7,553	2,770	5,101	21,801
2019	1,879	4,428	7,511	3,106	4,366	21,290
2020	1,446	5,096	9,264	3,222	6,608	25,636
2021	3,141	3,091	7,783	3,889	6,059	23,963

Year	Colorado[a]	Idaho	Montana	Utah	Wyoming	Total
2022	1,526	3,957	6,844	2,330	3,975	18,632
2023	1,740	4,200	10,169	5,631	5,527	27,267
2024	1,421	5,432	7,280	4,824	5,952	24,909
2025	925	7,538	9,154	2,889	4,810	25,316
3-yr Mean	1,362	5,723	8,868	4,448	5,430	25,831
All yr Mean	1,424	6,391	6,073	2,729	3,788	20,404

[a] Colorado counts include migrants that had arrived at the staging area in the San Luis Valley.

[b] Wyoming added six new survey areas per management plan guidelines.

[c] No survey in 2006

Table 3. Survey areas with sandhill crane estimates of 500 to 999 and ≥1,000 and percent change from previous year.

Survey Areas with ≥500 cranes	State	2025	% chg from 2024	2024	2023
Musselshell River	MT	992	45%	683	271
Henry's Fork/Snake R. confluence	ID	681	30%	522	321
Clark Fork of the Yellowstone	MT	628	30%	482	539
Box Elder Co.	UT	603	16%	520	200
Riverview Valley	WY	602	43%	420	715
Paradise-Shields Valleys	MT	575	33%	432	809
Total		4,081	33%	3,059	2,855

Survey Areas with ≥1,000 cranes	State	2025	% chg from 2024	2024	2023
Dillon-Twin Bridges	MT	3,690	14%	3,248	3,697
Bear River Valley	ID	1,700	46%	1,161	414
Bear River Valley	WY	1,463	-23%	1,900	982
Teton Basin	ID	1,265	8%	1,167	1,253
Malad River	ID	1,256	305%	310	235
Farson	WY	1,091	-22%	1,401	1,045
Jensen	UT	1,087	-61%	2,804	2,010
Pelican Lake Area	UT	793	-32%	1,173	2,810
Total		12,345	-6%	13,164	12,446

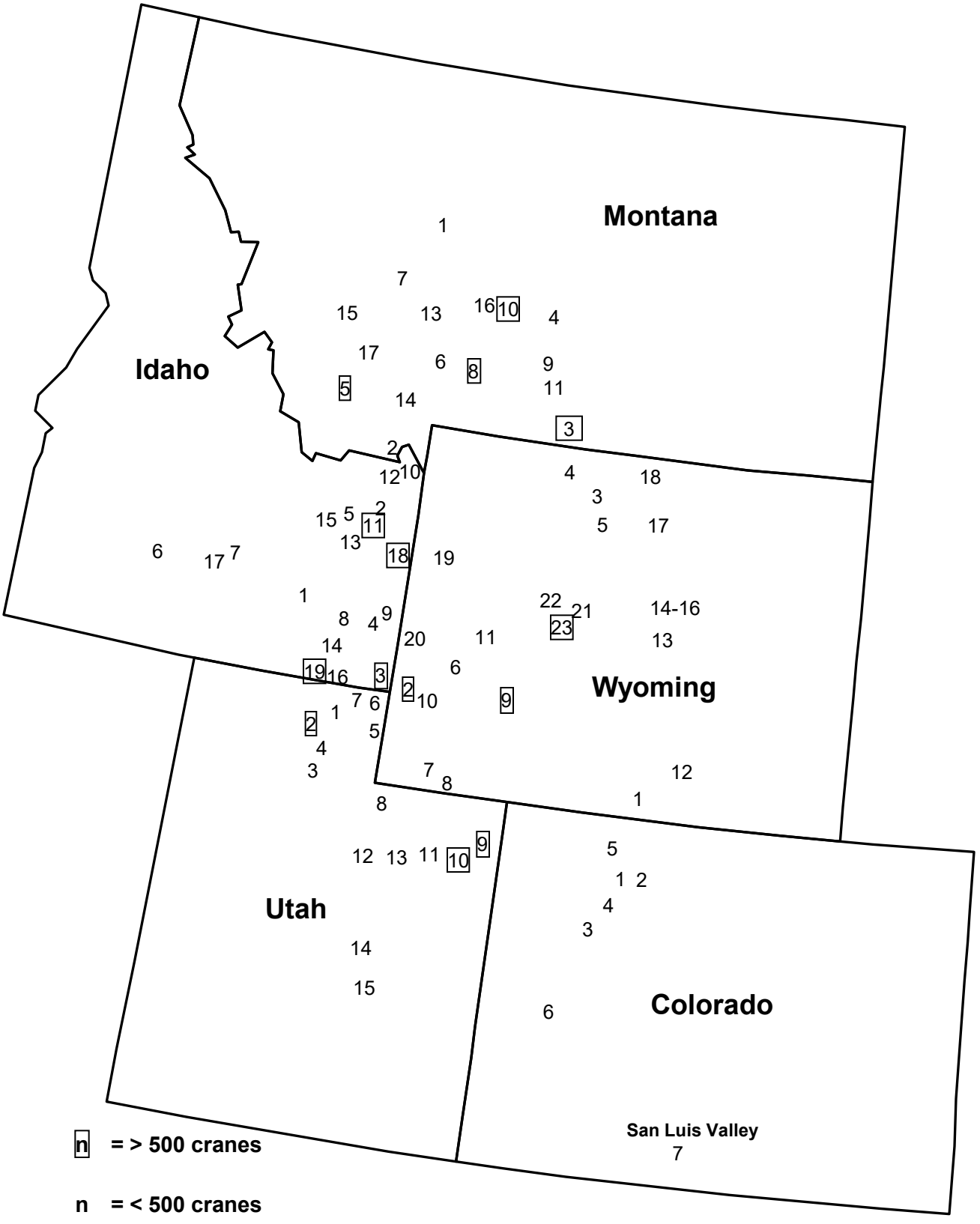

Figure 1. September survey locations for the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. See Table 1 for location names.

Appendix 1. Personnel responsible for conducting and coordinating the survey.

Aerial Survey Crew

Observer/pilot:	Philip Thorpe, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, Broomfield, CO
Observer:	Christopher Cain, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, Redding, CA
Observer:	Stephanie Catino, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, MD

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