

## **Public Encouraged to Report Whooping Crane Sightings**

LINCOLN – The entire population of whooping cranes in the Central Flyway is expected to migrate through Nebraska over the next several weeks. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission encourages the public to report whooping crane sightings.

Information on crane sightings is used to positively affect whooping crane conservation and recovery efforts.

Report any sightings to Game and Parks (402-471-0641), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (308-379-5562), or The Crane Trust's Whooper Watch hotline (1-888-399-2824). Emails may be submitted to [joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov](mailto:joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov).

Observers of cranes are encouraged to record number of birds, location, type of activity, and, if it can be determined, the number of adults and juveniles. Sandhill crane, American white pelican, great blue heron, trumpeter swan and snow goose are species that occasionally are mistaken for whooping cranes. Whooping cranes are approximately 5 feet tall and fly with their neck outstretched. Adults are all white with the exception of black wing tips and reddish-black facial pattern.

Whooping cranes that migrate through the Central Flyway often are referred to as the Aransas-Wood Buffalo flock. Cranes from this population migrate from wintering sites at and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas to breeding sites at and around Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta. In the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, this population was reduced to fewer than 20 birds and was perilously close to extinction.

As a result of legal protection, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act, as well as conservation efforts, whooping crane numbers have increased slowly. The Aransas-Wood Buffalo flock was estimated to number a little more than 300 individuals during the winter of 2015-2016. During the summer of 2016, 45 Whooping Crane chicks were reportedly fledged. Survey results show the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population continues to slowly increase.

Game and Parks reminds observers that whooping cranes should not be approached. Harassing whooping cranes may put them at risk and it also is a violation of state and federal law.

The following states and provinces comprise the Central Flyway: Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories.