

# USACE Natural Resource Management

## Migratory Birds



### Whooping Crane

### FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** The Whooping Crane population, estimated at 500 to 700 individuals in 1870 declined to only 16 individuals in the migratory population by 1941 as a consequence of hunting and specimen collection, human disturbance, and conversion of the primary nesting habitat to hay, pastureland, and grain production.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** The self-sustaining wild population is protected on public lands in the nesting area at Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and on the principal wintering area at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. A major traditional migratory stopover is at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. This population is closely monitored throughout the nesting season, on the wintering grounds, and during migration.

**STOPOVER HABITAT NEEDS:** Whooping Cranes (and other wildlife) need lakes, wetlands and small ponds with the following features for stopover habitat:

- Lakes/small ponds/wetlands from 0.3 acres and larger in size.
- Lakes/ponds/wetlands with some shallow areas 5 to 10 inches deep for roosting sites Flight glide path clear of obstructions for Whooping Cranes to land near roosting sites.
- No thick bushes or trees in or near landing site.
- Gradual or gentle slopes into lakes/ponds where water is shallow.
- Little or no emergent or submerged vegetation in lake at roost areas
- Extensive horizontal visibility from roost site so predators can be detected.
- 300 or more yards from human development or disturbance such as power lines.

**Height:** Whooping Cranes stand nearly 5 feet tall.

**Color:** Adult birds have bodies that are pure white except for a red patch on the head, a black “mustache” and black wing tips. Juvenile birds will have rusty or cinnamon colored feather with the white.

**Flock:** Whooping Cranes usually travel and feed in small groups—from 1 to 8 birds.

*Information and photos provided by Friends of the Wild Whooper.*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*

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**USACE ROLE:** Whooping Cranes migrate 2,500 miles two times each year between their Canadian nesting grounds and their winter habitat on the Texas coast. During their long migrations they must stopover to rest about 10 to 20 times. Mostly they stopover on lakes, natural wetlands and small ponds on private farms just to rest overnight. Over the years many thousands of stopover areas have been destroyed for other needs.



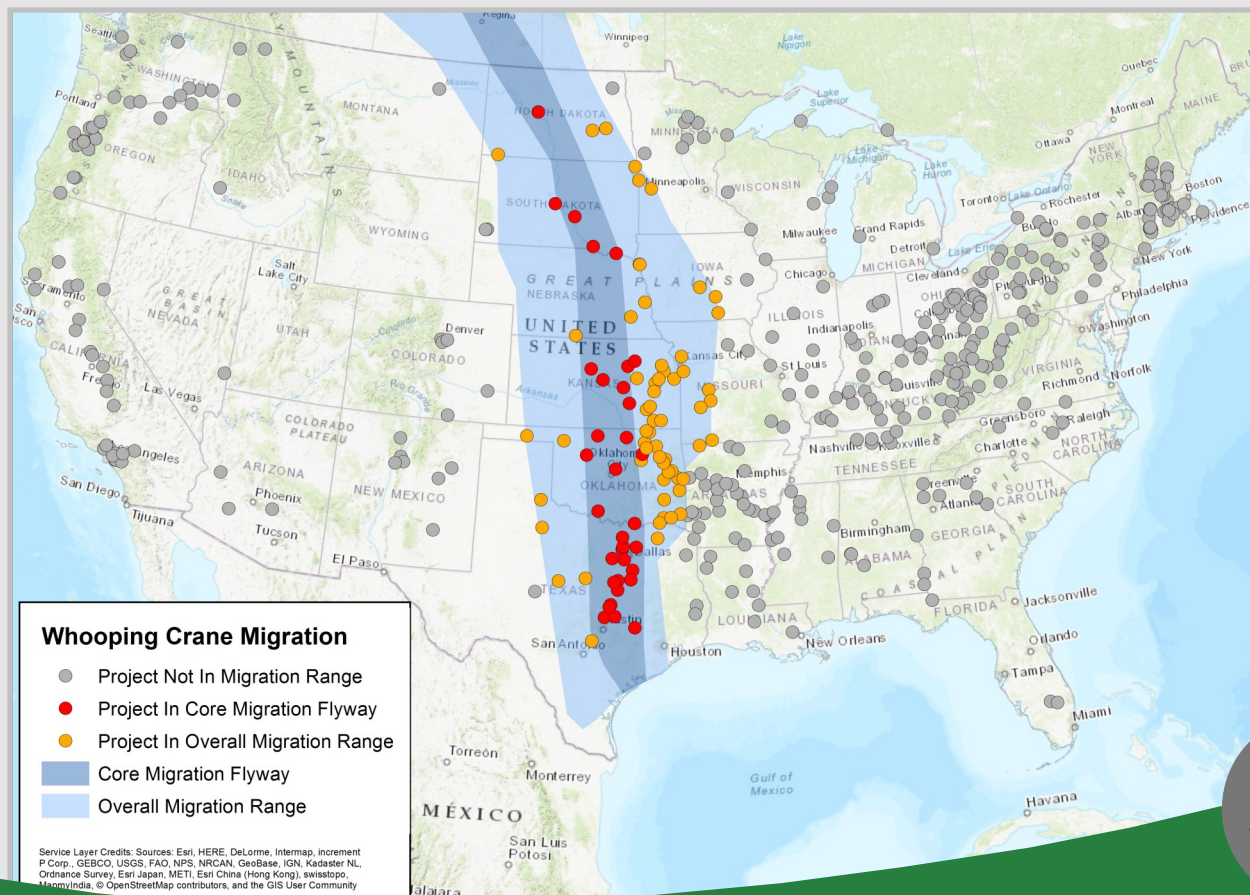
USACE owns a significant amount of potential stopover habitat along the Whooping Cranes migration corridor. Through an MOU with the Friends of the Wild Whoopers (FWW), USACE is working to improve habitat and protect existing areas to provide vital stopover habitat for Whooping Cranes. Ensuring that sufficient areas with the proper conditions as stopover sites are available is important for the survival of the species. Proactive techniques are being undertaken at several USACE projects to help reduce potential mortality that occurs during migration.

## WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

**1 Past:** Historically, habitat management did not have a direct focus on Whooping Cranes. Through increased awareness and closer working relationships with partners, USACE now focuses efforts at our water resource development projects to enhance habitat for Whooping Cranes, specifically for migratory stopover habitat.

**2 Present:** USACE is working with partners to help preserve and protect the Aransas/Wood Buffalo population of wild whooping cranes and their habitat. USACE is evaluating projects that exist within the migration corridor to identify existing habitat as well as potential areas where habitat can be created or enhanced. Site visits to each of these projects have been completed.

**3 Future:** The site visits identified sites where habitat can be improved. Working with FWW, and other partners, USACE plans to focus on prioritizing these habitat improvements in their annual work plans and budget prioritizations over the next several years.



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