

Future Whooping Crane Island Habitat on Canton Lake, Oklahoma

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by Chester McConnell, Friends of the Wild Whoopers

Whooping Cranes are facing continuing threats to their habitats as time goes by. During their 2,500 mile migration from their Canadian nesting area to their Texas wintering habitat they must stop 15 to 30 times to rest and feed. Secure stopover habitats are needed throughout the migration corridor approximately every 25 miles. And more secure wintering habitats are needed along the Texas coast near the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

Dwindling wetlands

Private lands have traditionally provided most of the “stopover habitats” but many of these properties are being more intensively managed and face various forms of development. And some wetlands are becoming dryer due to global warming. So, what can we do to help? Friends of the Wild Whoopers (FOTWW) contends that lands and waters on [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#) (USACE) lakes, military base wetlands and Indian Reservations within the migration corridor can provide much needed relief. Many of these lands can be developed and/or managed to provide more stopover habitats for endangered Whooping Cranes. Importantly, habitats for the cranes also benefit many other species of wildlife and fish. Likewise Whooping Cranes are compatible with other wildlife...

FOTWW has completed habitat evaluations on 32 military facilities, 8 Indian Reservations and 21 USACE lakes within the wild Whooping Crane migration corridor. Some of these properties currently have suitable stopover wetland habitats while other areas could be enhanced with minor work.

USACE lakes within the 6 state migration corridor are likely to become even more important to Whooping Cranes in the near future because of their locations and quality of “stopover habitats”. [Canton Lake](#) and others that are located in the Whooping Crane migration corridor can be especially valuable.

Canton Lake, Oklahoma

Canton Lake contains 7,910 acres of surface water and 14,861 acres of public hunting land that is managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC). This area is open year round, except for the migratory bird refuge which is closed annually from 15 October to 15 February. Canton Lake’s purpose is to provide flood risk management, water supply, fish and wildlife conservation and recreation. Since its impoundment more than 60 years ago, it has been enjoyed by millions of people. The lake offers extensive opportunity for outdoor recreation activities.

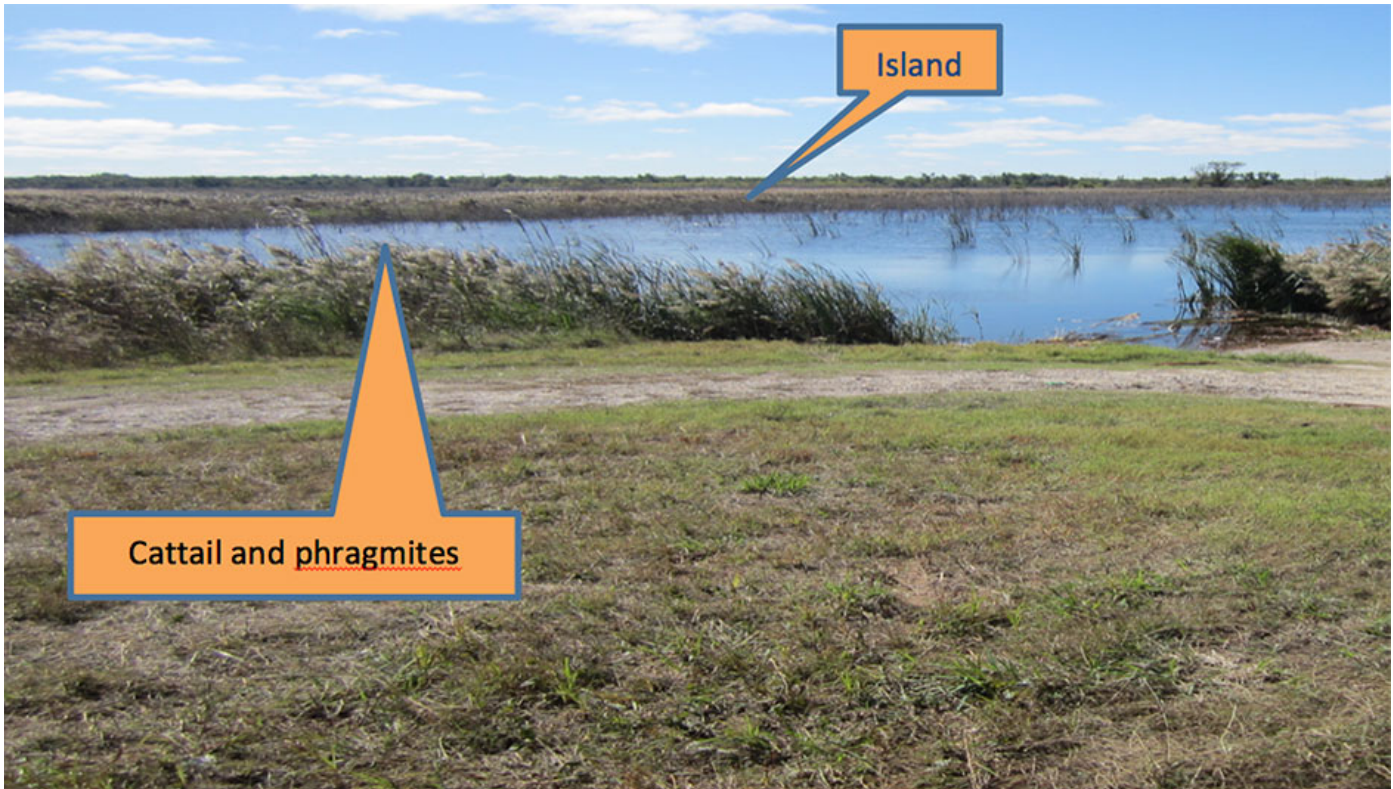
FOTWW is aware that Canton Lake, has been used by Whooping Cranes and we expect that to continue and increase. Both USACE and ODWC personnel have observed Whooping Cranes on the lake several times.

As FOTWW Wildlife Biologist, I visited Canton Lake on October 10, 2018 to assess potential “stopover habitats” for Whooping Cranes. David Hoover, Conservation Biologist, Kansas City, MO, USACE made arrangements for our trip. George Mayfield, Assistant Lake Manager and Chase Kokojan, ODWC participated in the lake stopover habitat evaluation. After discussing the natural resource objectives for Canton Lake we made a tour of the lake property by vehicle to examine the most likely places that would provide Whooping Crane “stopover habitats”. We identified several potential stopover habitat areas one of which is described below.

Figure 1. Satellite photo of island at western end of Canton Lake. Vegetation in the area can be treated with herbicide and allowed to dry. After the dead vegetation is dried, it can be burned. Additional treatments may be necessary to maintain the vegetation at a height height of 2 feet or less. Whooping Cranes require areas where they can readily observe predators such as coyotes and bobcats.



Figure 2. This photo displays the land base at the boat ramp, the cattail and phragmites plants and the island (same as in Fig. 1) in the background. If managed properly the island and shore area can become excellent “stopover habitat” for Whooping Cranes, waterfowl and other wild creatures. Vegetation in the area can be treated with herbicide and allowed to dry. After the dead vegetation is dried, it can be burned. A second treatment may be necessary to get the areas described in good condition.



DESCRIPTION OF POTENTIAL “STOPOVER HABITATS”:

The photos (Figs. 1 and 2) are potential “stopover habitats” for endangered Whooping Cranes to rest and roost. The island is located in an isolated location and not near frequently travel roads or power lines. The size and configuration of the wetland area varies with the levels of lake water. When the photos in this report were taken, water levels were approximately 1.5 feet higher than “normal”. Flight glide paths to the shore areas are available from different directions for approaching cranes. The shore areas and island are essentially clear of bushes and trees. Horizontal visibility from the island and shore roost sites, if properly managed, would allow Whooping Cranes to detect any predators that may be in the area. The slope of the shore and lake edge is gradual and some water depths of 2 to 10 inches would be available during “normal” lake water levels. There is little emergent or submerged vegetation in lake at these roost sites. The locations are 200 or more yards from human development or disturbance such as power lines. Hundreds of acres of foraging areas are located on ODWC wildlife food plots and in nearby agriculture fields. In addition there are wild foods in adjacent managed grasslands and wetlands that provide an abundance of insects, wild seeds and other wild food.