

Whooping Crane Fact Sheet



Whooping Cranes in Flight



Foraging Whooping Cranes



Adult with juvenile

The Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) is a federal and state listed endangered migratory species. The Whooping Crane was federally listed as endangered in 1967. Major river systems used by whooping cranes in Nebraska include the Platte, Loup, Republican, and Niobrara rivers. Additionally, a 3-mile-wide, 56-mile-long reach of the Platte River between Lexington and Denman, Nebraska, has been federally designated as critical habitat for whooping cranes. (Information from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)

Order: *Gruiformes*

Family: *Gruidae*

Status: State and Federally Endangered. **Description:** L 52"(132 cm) W 87"(221 cm). Sexes similar but males are larger. White body with red and black facial markings. Yellow bill and long dark legs. Immature is white with tawny head and neck, and reddish-brown mottling on rest of body. **Habitat:** In Nebraska is found along the Platte Valley, with its wide slow moving river and associated sandbars and islands. Nearby wet meadows, croplands, and marshlands are important for foraging. **Status/Range:** Occasional spring and fall migrant along Platte Valley. 90% of sightings within 30 miles of Platte River, and 80% occurred between Lexington and Grand Island. **Call:** Shrill "ker-loo-ker-lee-loo" trumpet. **Comments:** Endangered. Management and protection programs slowly succeeding.

Similar: Sandhill Crane, Snow Geese, and especially American White Pelicans in flight:
(Information from Nebraska Game and Parks Commission website)



The Whooping Crane is one of the rarest birds in North America and also one of the largest. Whooping cranes are vulnerable to accidents during migration. Each spring they travel north from their wintering grounds around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas to their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in central Canada (2,400 miles). Each fall this route is reversed. Their journey traverses eastern Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. In Nebraska, they stop to rest and feed on the Platte, North and Middle Loup and Niobrara Rivers. (Information taken from the USFWS Draft Revised International Whooping Crane Recovery Plan Jan 2005)

Whooping Crane Survey Protocol

Whooping Cranes can be disturbed by sights (human figures, equipment within sight) and sounds (loud equipment, banging, etc.) that are abnormal (roadway traffic is normal). Therefore surveys are needed to ensure disturbance is minimized.

Dates of Survey:

- Spring Migration – March 6 – April 29*
- Fall Migration – October 9 – November 15*
- When construction activities are occurring, surveys should be conducted daily during these two time frames.

** Birds can migrate earlier and later than these dates. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission) and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will contact project proponents if the survey periods need to be adjusted based on the status of the migration during any given year.*

Time of Survey:

- Survey project each day within one hour prior to the start of the workday, with at least one survey done no later than 10 am. Record start and stop time.
- Survey area within 0.5 miles of project using binoculars or spotting scope.

If Whooping Cranes are not seen during the morning survey, work may begin after completion of the survey.

If Whooping Cranes are spotted within 0.5 miles of the active construction at any time:

- Do not start work. Immediately contact the Commission¹ or the Service² for further instruction.
- Stop work if seen at times other than the morning survey.
- Work can begin or resume if birds move and are greater than 0.5 miles from the construction/activity area; record sighting, bird departure time, and work start time on survey form.

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