

June 29, 2010

Mr. Dan Alonso  
Refuge Manager  
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P.O. Box 100  
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Re: Five-year status review of whooping crane - FWS-R2-ES-2010-N028

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the 5-year review of the whooping crane. These reviews are helpful in identifying the best scientific and commercial data available about each species and provide an opportunity to reassess how best to conserve and recover species. Since the whooping crane was listed in 1967, there have been significant efforts to recover this species and ensure generations to come are able to enjoy opportunities to see the majestic bird.

Many conservation measures have been implemented and research on species biology and habitat conditions have been done; however, continued progress is still needed. We hope the results of the 5-year review will be helpful in directing efforts to conserve and expand resources available for the whooping crane. This conservation and recovery is important to economic growth – as the whooping crane flock is a significant tourist attraction for the coastal region of the state, along with multiple other opportunities for birding, fishing and recreation.

The 81st Legislature created the Interagency Task Force on Economic Growth and Endangered Species (task force) as a mechanism to assist communities and landowners in implementing innovative and cost-efficient programs to help enhance habitat for and recover threatened and endangered species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department identified the whooping crane as a priority species for the task force to focus on. The task force is now working to identify cost-efficient strategies for mitigation of impacts and conservation of this species while promoting economic growth and development in the area.

There is still a great deal to learn about the whooping crane and how programs should be tailored to best conserve and recover the species. The guiding principles of the task force support the use of sound scientific research in developing programs working with threatened and endangered species. Gathering the most recent and best scientific data through projects like the 5-year review is very important in furthering initiatives supporting the whooping crane.

The development of the whooping crane flock in Texas has shown the dedication of all involved in protecting the species as populations have increased more than 15 fold since the early 1940s. Several community-based programs are currently taking shape to advance efforts protecting the crane. We urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff to stay in close contact with the ongoing processes that could assist in further conservation of the whooping crane. These types of programs are successful because they have landowner and community support as well as significant resources and assistance from state and federal natural resource agencies. Working with these partnerships will be crucial in continued growth of the whooping crane population.



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Additional efforts are in place that could provide more data on how best to conserve the whooping crane. For example, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 3 in 2007, a comprehensive water planning bill that created a process to determine appropriate environmental flows for rivers and bays across the state. The Guadalupe, San Antonio, Mission and Aransas Rivers and Mission, Copano, Aransas and San Antonio Bays Basin and Bay Area Stakeholder Committee (BBASC) began work this spring to develop recommendations regarding appropriate environmental flows for this area. Although the process is not geared specifically to focus only on the whooping crane, this process will take a holistic view of the watershed, providing benefit to all species in the region. Through the BBASC's work with the appointed Basin and Bay Expert Science Team, we would expect additional information to be gathered that might be helpful in efforts to further conserve and protect the whooping crane.

Thank you for your work in proceeding with the 5-year review. Information collected through this process along with developing programs will be beneficial for the continued growth of the whooping crane population as well as the economy of the coastal region.

Sincerely

Susan Combs

