



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

May 6, 2009

Dear Mr. Morton

### Re: Proposed Sandhill Crane Hunt

It recently came to Alberta Wilderness Association's (AWA) attention that the Alberta government is proposing to introduce a hunting season for sandhill cranes in Alberta. Although AWA has no objection to hunting when it is demonstrably sustainable, there is considerable doubt that this would in fact be the case with sandhill cranes, and so we do not support the proposed crane hunt.

- The Alberta government's report, *General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005*, recognizes the sandhill crane as a *species sensitive to human disturbance*. The report suggests that the species is *Vulnerable to wetland loss* in its boreal forest habitat and so, if nothing is currently being done to address this continuing wetland loss, the precautionary principle would suggest that introducing a hunt now would be inappropriate.
- Although the government's hunting proposals suggest a mid-continent population of 378,420 birds, this is certainly at the lower end of the mid-continent population management plan objectives of 349,000 to 472,000 birds. The 2005 US Fish and Wildlife Service report *Status and harvest of Sandhill Cranes. Mid-continent & Rocky Mountain populations*, suggests that the Mid-continent population (MCP) "included at least 510,000 sandhill cranes in March 1982."
- The hunting recommendation does little to address the issue of sandhill crane subspecies, particularly the Greater sandhill crane. According to Janice Hughes, author of the 2008 book *Cranes: a Natural History of a Bird in Crisis*, "hunting can place undue stress on local populations even if the species as a whole appears plentiful."
- The Alberta government's 2001 report, *Status of the whooping crane in Alberta*, states "accidental shooting due to misidentification and poaching are still of concern." The risk of even one misidentified whooping crane being shot is quite simply too high for such a critically endangered population. Although the government's proposals for hunting sandhill cranes do downplay the risk of whooping cranes being shot, it is only to be expected that accidental whooping crane deaths are likely to be under-reported.



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AWA believes that to go ahead with a provincial sandhill crane hunt would be inappropriate at the current time. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to hearing your decision on the proposed hunt.

Yours truly

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

Nigel Douglas,  
Conservation Specialist

Cc: Kent Hehr, Alberta Liberal Party Critic for Sustainable Resource Development