

*Fostering the
Land Ethic
through the legacy
of Aldo Leopold*

October 28, 2021

The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor of Wisconsin
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

RE: Sand Hill Crane Hunting in Wisconsin

Dear Governor Evers,

On behalf of the Aldo Leopold Foundation (<https://www.aldoleopold.org>), I call your attention to some important issues regarding Sandhill Crane hunting in Wisconsin. Although the Aldo Leopold Foundation supports the state's hunting traditions, the current process of launching a Sandhill Crane hunt in Wisconsin is flawed in ways we feel compelled to address as an organization advancing a more ethical and science-based relationship between people and nature. We urge that more careful consideration be given to improving the process of initiating a hunting season for the Sandhill Crane, a species with special biological characteristics unlike other Wisconsin game birds (e.g., 4-5 years to reach sexual maturity, low rate of reproduction, extended parental care, slow rate of population growth, slow recovery from losses). We would like to highlight a set of facts and myths that are relevant to the current proposed legislation establishing a Sandhill Crane hunt:

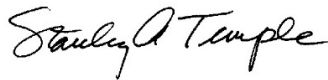
- **Fact:** *The current process has not adequately included advice of wildlife experts:* The process whereby the proposed crane hunt was formulated failed to seek input from the many experts in Wisconsin and the Mississippi Flyway knowledgeable about crane biology and wildlife management. A bias toward narrow agricultural and sport hunting interests meant that considerations of the special features of the Sandhill Crane's ecology and behavior have been largely ignored.
- **Myth:** *Proponents hold that a statewide Sandhill Crane hunt will resolve crop depredations:* There has been little acknowledgement of the reality that the proposed crane hunt would be of essentially no value in alleviating crane damage to newly planted corn. A basic principle of wildlife management prescribes that any method used to address this type of conflict should target the offending birds at the specific times and places of the conflict, not months later when birds from around the state, most of which have not caused conflicts, have intermingled after the breeding season.
- **Fact:** *Solutions to conflicts between agriculture and Sandhill Cranes currently exist:* There are demonstrably effective seed treatments and easily available permits from the Wildlife Damage and Abatement Program that follow this basic principle of wildlife management and that allow farmers to deal directly with problem birds.
- **Myth:** *Proponents hold that a statewide Sandhill Crane hunt will generate revenue that offsets crop damage assessments:* Despite overly optimistic suggestions to the contrary, projected revenues generated from a biologically sustainable and hence limited crane hunt would fall far short of covering damage claims and the additional costs of administering a crane hunt.
- **Myth:** *Experiences hunting Sandhill Cranes in other states are directly applicable to Wisconsin:* If cranes are ever hunted in Wisconsin or other northern states and Canadian provinces, it would be the first time that the Eastern Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes would be hunted within

its core breeding range. Prior hunting of cranes in the Eastern Population has taken place further south as cranes were passing through states on southward migration. Hence, special precautions, not needed further south, are warranted here.

- **Fact:** *A fall crane hunt in Wisconsin requires such special precautions:* Specifically, a very significant 3-month period in the Sandhill Crane's annual life cycle occurs in Wisconsin when birds congregate at traditional staging areas each fall in preparation for migration. No consideration has so far been given to shielding cranes from hunting while they are gathered at traditional staging areas around the state. The attached explanatory note explains the rationale for not hunting cranes while they are using traditional staging areas and describes ways that a crane hunt could potentially occur while not disturbing cranes during such an important phase of their annual cycle.

I would be happy to provide additional input if needed. I can be contacted at satemple@aldoleopold.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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and
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