

**DATE:** March 8, 2021

**STATE:** Texas

**BRIEFING FOR THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**PREPARED BY:** Angela D. Anders, Ph.D., Recovery Branch Supervisor, Ecological Services

**SUBJECT:** Whooping Crane Recommendation Team Meeting Briefing

**PURPOSE OF BRIEFING DOCUMENT:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Legacy Region 2 led a status-review Recommendation Team Meeting (RTM) for the whooping crane on February 9 and 10, based on a recently completed Species Status Assessment (SSA). The recommendation team included Assistant Regional Directors – Ecological Services or their designees from throughout the species' United States range, including Service's Legacy Regions 2, 3, 4, and 6. The outcome of the RTM was a recommendation to downlist the whooping crane from endangered to threatened, with a 4(d) rule.

Whooping crane populations currently include the naturally-occurring migratory Aransas-Wood Buffalo population and two reintroduced, non-essential experimental populations (NEPs), the Eastern Migratory and Louisiana Non-migratory populations, designated under 10(j) rules. Under the recommended downlisting, the NEPs would retain their 10(j) status with their own existing 4(d) rules. The recommended downlisting and 4(d) rule would thus apply to the status of the Aransas-wood Buffalo population and any other non-10(j) populations that may occur in the future.

The briefing for the Regional Director (RD) will include information on the content of the Whooping Crane SSA report, outcome of the RTM, and preliminary information on a proposed 4(d) rule for the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population. Additional discussion with Service's Legacy Regions 3, 4, and 6 is planned to further refine the recommended 4(d) rule content. Following these discussions and this RD briefing, with concurrence we will plan for a multi-region RD briefing with requests for cross-regional concurrence.

**MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:** This briefing will provide information to the RD on the Whooping Crane SSA and status-review RTM outcome, recommending downlisting of the whooping crane from endangered to threatened with a 4(d) rule. Ecological Services will request RD's concurrence on this classification recommendation.

**BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:** N/A

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**APPROVED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Regional Director - Ecological Services