



News Release

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North America's Tallest Bird on the Road to Recovery

Decades of conservation efforts lead to a proposed change from endangered to threatened for whooping crane

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes reclassifying the endangered [whooping crane](#) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Based on a review of the best available science, the Service is proposing that whooping crane populations are stable and increasing, adequate protections are in place to support recovery, and the species now meets the definition of threatened under the ESA.

“This action represents a conservation success story over 70 years in the making,” said Amy Lueders, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director. “Decades of extensive conservation work by federal, state, non-profit organizations and private landowners have led to increases in both the wild and captive populations, and we are proposing that the current whooping crane populations are no longer in danger of extinction.”

The ESA defines an endangered species as a species that is “in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range,” and a threatened species as one that is “likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

When the whooping crane was listed as one of the nation’s first endangered species under the Endangered Species Preservation Act in 1967 (a precursor to the Endangered Species Act of 1973), fewer than 50 of the birds existed in North America, and the species faced a heightened risk of extinction from habitat destruction, shooting, and displacement by human activities. Since then, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service and other government and non-profit organizations have implemented a variety of [recovery actions](#) to improve the population throughout its range.

Today, more than 500 whooping cranes exist in a wild, migratory population. Additionally, more than 150 whooping cranes occur within two reintroduced populations and 145 are being cared for in captive breeding programs across the country.

Though the whooping crane population is recovering, it continues to face challenges from climate change impacts, habitat loss, altered fire regimes, woody plant encroachment, collisions with structures, and chemical spills.

In addition to the proposed reclassification, the Service also proposes a rule under section 4(d) of the ESA that will tailor protections needed for the bird's recovery. This rule allows some types of actions that are normally prohibited under the ESA as long as those actions are consistent with conservation of the whooping crane. Additionally, the requirement for federal agencies to consult with the Service where their actions may harm the whooping crane or its critical habitat will continue unchanged.

The whooping crane occurs only in North America and is North America's tallest bird, with males approaching 5 feet when standing. Whooping cranes are a long-lived species; current estimates suggest a longevity in the wild of at least 30 years. The common name "whooping crane" probably originated from the loud, single-note vocalization given repeatedly by the birds when they are alarmed.

The last remaining wild, migratory flock of whooping cranes, the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population, nests in Wood Buffalo National Park and adjacent areas in Canada and migrates through the Great Plains states of eastern Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma, before wintering in coastal marshes on and around [Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Texas.

An additional 150 whooping cranes occur in reintroduced populations known as the [eastern migratory population](#) and the [Louisiana non-migratory population](#). The proposed reclassification of the whooping crane does not change the status of these "Nonessential Experimental Populations (NEP)", which will continue to be treated as threatened by the Service's ESA 10(j) designation.

The proposal to change the status of the whooping crane from endangered to threatened will be published in the [Federal Register](#), opening a 60-day public comment period. The proposed rule and supporting documents are available online at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. ~~FWS-R4-ES-2019-0018~~.

The Service has scheduled a virtual public meeting and hearing on ~~XX/XX/2021~~ from ~~XX-XX~~ p.m. (CT) via the Zoom online video platform and via teleconference. This virtual public meeting and hearing is intended to give the public an opportunity to learn more about the proposed reclassification of the whooping crane and an opportunity to comment on the proposal. Registration is required and can be done online at: [link](#)

The use of a virtual public hearing is consistent with our regulations at 50 CFR 424.16(c)(3).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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