



March 2, 2021

Senator Edward McBroom
Chair, Michigan Senate Natural Resources Committee
Via email, Jackie Mosher, Committee Clerk
jmosher@senate.michigan.gov ofcsc@senate.michigan.gov

Re: Michigan conservation, animal/wildlife advocacy and protection groups that oppose SR 20, to be heard before the Senate Natural Resources Committee on March 3, 2021, 8:30 AM

Dear Chair McBroom and Senate Natural Resources Committee Members:

On behalf of our members, supporters, and the Michigan constituents our groups combined represent, we oppose removing the non-game status of the Sandhill Crane in the state of Michigan. It is our combined, considered opinion that the following factors argue against instituting a recreational hunting season on the Sandhill Crane in Michigan:

1. *Life History Considerations:* Opening a hunting season of the Sandhill Crane in our state would cause negative ecological impacts to a species that, just a hundred years ago, was vulnerable. Not all populations of a species are able to sustain game status; we cannot compare Michigan's crane numbers to, for example, Nebraska's crane numbers. Biologists' and ornithologists' opinions reflect best wildlife management of this bird in our state, which should instead involve reinforcing protection of this species by virtue of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In our state specifically, the Greater Sandhill Crane is not a suitable game species. These birds are extremely slow to mature compared to more traditional game species, such as the Eastern Wild Turkey. Each breeding pair of cranes typically has only one chick per year that survives. The adults are long lived, mate for life, and migrate with their young to ensure survival. Because of these and other factors, a hunt would be disruptive to the viability of the bonded pair, and to the successful migration with their young, should an adult be lost.

2. *Population Dynamics:* The population numbers cited in the proposal do not reflect actual crane census numbers. There has been no credible evidence presented to demonstrate that there is a population "explosion" of Sandhill Cranes in Michi-

gan. As a northern breeding state, there is uncertainty as to population distribution between migratory and non-migratory resident birds, but this only calls for further protection of sub-populations that are not fully understood or documented. Proponents of an annual hunt rely on annual variations that do not reflect the long-term population, nor the still-vulnerable population due to factors cited above. Additionally, Sandhill Cranes simply don't express the population dynamics that can tolerate an annual recreational harvest — a principle that has governed conservation and hunting for the past century. Thus, Michigan's Sandhill Crane is considered a vulnerable and recovering sub-species of the Greater Sandhill Crane, and it is still at risk from several factors, including continued loss of their wetland habitats.

3. Ecological Services: Michigan's healthy Sandhill Crane population is likely a source population for neighboring regions where populations are still recovering; a hunt in Michigan is short-sighted and does not account for the bigger ecological picture that requires sound conservation and management decisions.

4. Agricultural Stakeholders: Michigan farmers are currently able to obtain a special permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help them mitigate and control conflicts caused by migratory birds on corn plantings adjacent to prime wetland habitats. While we understand the nuisance claims for some agricultural areas — especially those near protected wetlands — a fall hunting season would not provide direct assistance to crop areas impacted by Sandhill Cranes occurring in the spring. Biologists and researchers consistently agree that the timing of a fall hunting season would not provide any solutions for farmers' complaints related to spring crop consumption by birds. The International Crane Foundation has helped develop an affordable, non-toxic, non-lethal chemical deterrent called Avipel, which has demonstrated to be more effective than lethal control in reducing crop consumption concerns for farmers.

5. Historical and Cultural Values: Cherished by birdwatchers, Michigan is home to the first Sandhill Crane sanctuary in North America, established in 1941 — Michigan Audubon's Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary. Since 1994, people from throughout the Midwest have traveled to southwest Michigan to enjoy "CraneFest," an annual celebration of the migration of the Sandhill Crane.

6. Economics: There is a pronounced, time-tested interest among midwestern wildlife watchers in Sandhill Cranes and birdwatching in general. With approximately 3.2 million residents aged 16 and older participating in non-consumptive wildlife-watching activities, we spend \$1.2 billion in bird- and wildlife-viewing activities. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that wildlife watchers now outspend hunters by almost three to one nationwide.¹

Finally, as some of us may recall earlier iterations of this resolution, some supporters have shared misleading images of Eurasian Cranes in Israel that depict cranes ubiquitously as "nuisance birds." Do not be misled by the exaggerated claims and images of a bird in another country that was part of a tourist stunt. These are not the Sandhill Cranes of Michigan. We ask that you consider the facts.

Many of your constituents, particularly in the Upper Peninsula, will share with you their love of Sand-

hill Cranes that are not migratory but are year-round residents in Michigan. The displacement of crane families and groups, both migratory and resident, upsets more people in the state of Michigan than it would please those who refer to this federally protected bird as “the rib-eye of the sky.”

Previous claims have also falsely implied that Sandhill Cranes killed with a depredation permit could be consumed and therefore not “wasted,” and even featured a recipe for cooking Sandhill Cranes.² All of this belies the notion that the call for a recreational Sandhill Crane hunt has anything to do with the principles of sound science and wildlife management that reflects best ecological practices as well as the interests of the people.

The truth of the matter is, it is only because Michigan has protected the Sandhill Crane that its population was able to recover and become a conservation success story that our state is proud of. The Sandhill Crane deserves continued full protection as a non-game species.

We, the undersigned 501(c)(3) organizations and the constituents whose values, knowledge, and opinions we represent, urge you to not report SR 20 out of committee.

Most sincerely,

Ahimsa Safe Haven, Onsted
All Species Kinship, Battle Creek
Audubon Society of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo
Attorneys for Animals, Canton
Barn Sanctuary, Chelsea
Barry County Humane Society, Hastings
Bird Center of Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor
Branch County Bloom, Sherwood
Chubby Goat Acres, Schoolcraft
Detroit Audubon, Detroit
Detroit Zoological Society, Royal Oak
Grand Rapids for Animals, Grand Rapids
Paws for Life Rescue, Troy
Humane Society of Huron Valley, Ann Arbor
The Humane Society of the United States, Gaithersburg, MD
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance, Madison, WI
Kalamazoo Humane Society, Kalamazoo
Kzoo Cat Café and Rescue, Kalamazoo
International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, WI
Liz’s Little Wildlife Rescue, Portage
Michigan Animal Shelter Rescue Network
Michigan Audubon, Okemos
Michigan Humane, Detroit
Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council, Traverse City
Out Back Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Ottawa Lake
Richland Animal Rescue & Equine Shelter, Richland
Save a Soul Rescue, Kalkaska
Songbird Protection Coalition, Lansing
Washtenaw Safe Passage, Ann Arbor
WILDSIDE Rehabilitation Center, Eaton Rapids

¹ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: “2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Outdoor Recreation.” www.fws.gov/wsfrprograms/subpages/nationalsurvey/nat_survey2016.pdf

² Matheny, Keith: “DNR’s, lawmaker’s actions questioned in push for sandhill crane hunt.” *Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 12, 2017.