November 19, 2025

TO:

Members, Wisconsin Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

RE: Support for **Senate Bill 112**

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing the interests of hundreds of thousands of sportsmen and women in Wisconsin and across North America, we are writing in support of sound, science-based management of Sandhill cranes in the state of Wisconsin.

In 2024, many of our groups pushed for, or were part of, the *Legislative Council Study Committee on Sandhill Cranes* that examined population trends and determined whether any changes to state law would effectively address the incidence and consequences of crop damage caused by Sandhill cranes in this state. As part of a comprehensive review of policy options, the committee considered whether the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) should seek federal approval to establish a hunting season for Sandhill cranes.

The recommendations from that Legislative Council Study Committee are reflected in two pieces of legislation - **Assembly Bill 117** and **Senate Bill 112** - both of which would establish a regulated, sustainable hunting season for Sandhill cranes.

To that end, we respectfully request that you **support** the amended version of Senate Bill 112 – legislation that will provide the DNR with another tool in their toolbox to manage a growing species, while also providing sportsmen and women in Wisconsin with an additional sustainable, regulated hunting opportunity in the state.

The population of Sandhill cranes that call Wisconsin home has doubled in last decade and has exceeded the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) upper population goal by nearly 100%. Sandhill cranes are a conservation success story, and their resurgence has been enjoyed by myriad of user groups across the country. This has been in large part from funding derived from sportsmen and women who have continually paid the way for conservation across the United States, benefiting both game and non-game species.

Wisconsin represents the largest breeding state for Sandhill cranes in the eastern part of the country, and the DNR should have the best available data and full suite of options available to properly manage this iconic species.

Per the USFWS, there are more than 1.4 million sandhill cranes in North America with an expanding population of roughly 58,000 within Wisconsin, which are considered part of the eastern population. This wildlife success story is the result of sound management of the populations, and investments in habitat important to the lifecycle of the crane.

While this rapidly growing Sandhill crane population thrills wildlife viewers, it has also brought expanding agricultural impacts and other negative interactions with humans. For example, crop damage claims by farmers in Wisconsin in 2023 totaled over $1.9 million with self-born mitigation costs (AVIPEL) of another $2 million - which is only effective on corn, and not potatoes or other crops which are nearly half of the damage. Focusing exclusively on corn, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DCTAP) says over 3 million acres are at risk, which would have an AVIPEL mitigation cost of over $40 million dollars annually - unaffordable by farmers or the state.

Additionally, the number of birds killed through crop depredation permits increased over 200% within the last decade (more than 10,000 birds), with 1,400 sandhill cranes removed in 2023 alone. These killed birds, per United States Department of Agriculture guidelines, must be left in the field and not used in any way.

Our organizations recognize that recreational hunting continues to be one of the most effective and cost-efficient methods of wildlife management, and that the DNR should have every available tool at their disposal to help manage this growing population. Additionally, as a legislator sworn to uphold the state constitution, which includes the explicit "*right to fish, hunt, trap and harvest game subject only to reasonable restrictions as prescribed by law*" clause, please consider there are no such reasonable restrictions in place for the Sandhill crane.

If approved, Wisconsin would join Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama in hunting Sandhill cranes from the eastern population in the United States, which is intensively managed and highly regulated in collaboration and partnership with the USFWS. Additionally, Quebec and Ontario are going through the formal process now to establish hunting seasons that could begin as early as fall of 2026.

In closing, supporting Senate Bill 112 is an investment in Wisconsin's proud conservation legacy. A regulated sandhill crane season will strengthen science-based wildlife management, help mitigate agricultural losses, and ensure that the state's natural resources are cared for through the proven funding model of hunters and conservationists. Together, we can sustain healthy crane populations while preserving the traditions and stewardship ethic that make Wisconsin a national leader in conservation.

Respectfully,

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Ducks Unlimited

National Shooting Sports Foundation

Safari Club International

Sportsmen's Alliance

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association