

FALL SURVEY OF THE EASTERN POPULATION OF SANDHILL CRANES

2020 FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The fall survey of Eastern Population (hereafter EP) of Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) staging areas has been conducted throughout the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways since 1979. The fall survey traditionally occurs during the last week of October under the assumption that the majority of EP Sandhill Cranes that breed in Canada have migrated to staging areas in the United States. The survey is a collaborative effort by state and federal agencies as well as citizen scientists.

We ask volunteers to visit recommended sites or sites in which cranes have been observed in previous years. Observation methods include roadside counts or point estimates (i.e., cranes departing from or arriving to a roost). Observers record date, start and stop times, location information, weather, and the number of cranes observed for each site.

This survey is not a complete census of EP Sandhill Cranes, but instead serves as an index of abundance. Over the past decade, EP Sandhill Cranes have expanded in both size and geographic range. The information collected allows the Service and Flyway Councils to quantify estimates and trends of EP Sandhill Cranes in an attempt to better manage this species.

In 2019, the Service launched the EP Sandhill Crane fall survey data portal (<https://www.fws.gov/epsandhill/>). This online platform was designed to improve survey coordination, enhance communication, reduce the burden of data entry, and provide precise information about where roosting and foraging locations occur each year. This platform provides both volunteers and the Service more refined information about habitat use and selection, as well as population distribution across the Midwest landscape and has significantly reduced the time required to coordinate the survey and analyze the data.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

- In 2020, volunteers in ten states and the Province of Ontario conducted the fall EP Sandhill Crane survey. This year, the Service was pleased to bring Iowa in to the survey (Table 1).
- The total number of Sandhill Cranes counted across the region for the 2020 survey was 94,879 (Figure 1). This was a +6% change from the previous years' count of 89,504. The largest percentage of birds were counted in Wisconsin (52%) followed by Michigan (17%), Minnesota (12%), and Indiana (11%). Despite the Covid pandemic, the effort among states was comparable to previous survey efforts.
- Weather for the first week of the survey (October 26 - 31) was reported as relatively mild with average high temperatures across the surveyed region at 45 °F (7 °C) and the average low

temperatures at 34 °F degrees (1 °C). There was little to no precipitation and average winds were reported as mild. However, during the following week of the survey (November 1 - 4), the reported average high temperatures increased to 61°F degrees (16 °C) and the average lows were 39 °F degrees (4 °C). Again, there was little precipitation, except for trace amounts reported in portions of Indiana and Ohio and the average wind speeds were fairly mild throughout the region. This may explain the increase in observations for northern regions.

Figure 1. Total number of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes counted, 1979 – 2020.

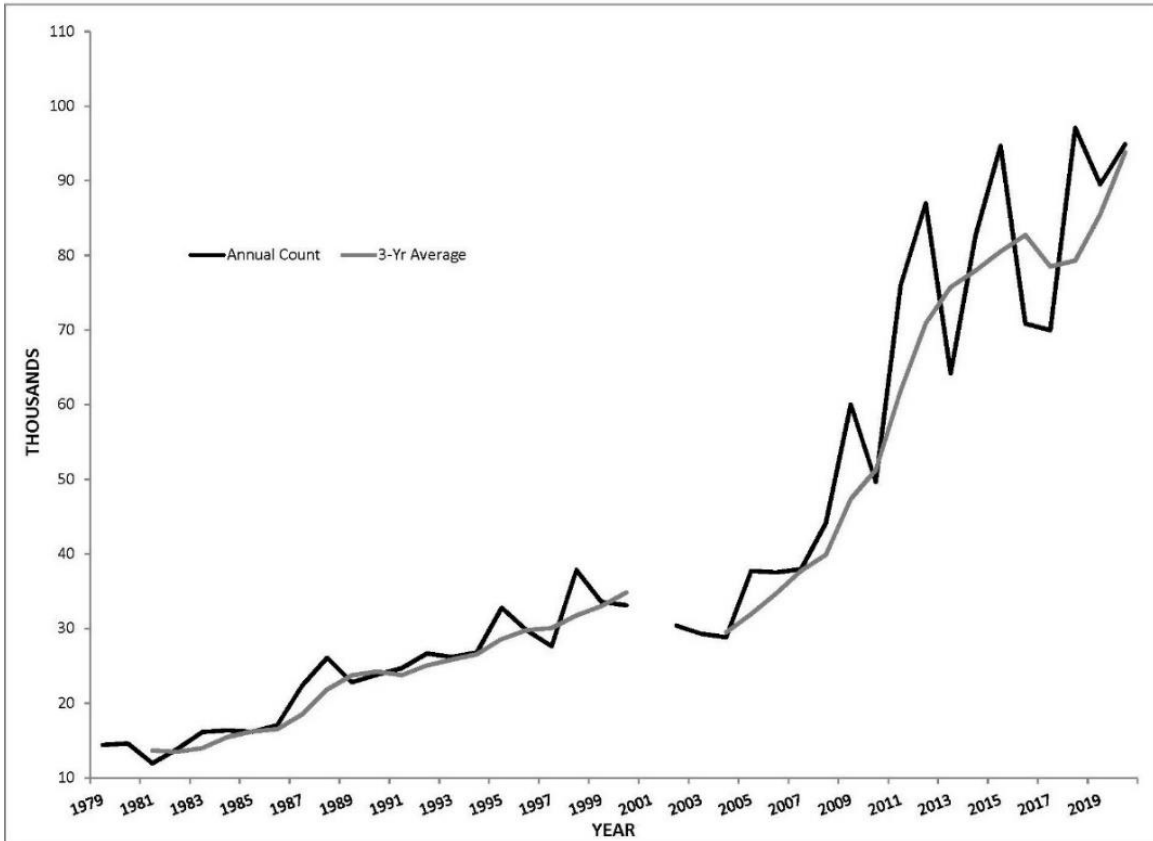


Figure 2. Total number of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes counted by state in 2017 - 2020.

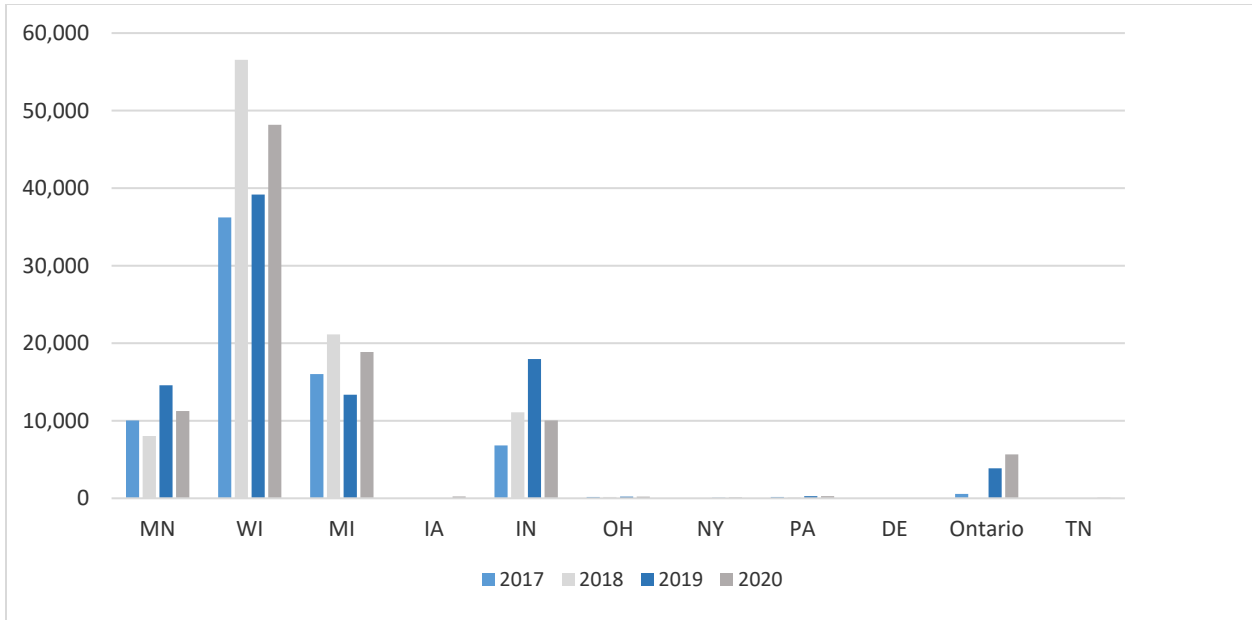


Figure 3. Total number of sites surveyed in each state 2017 - 2020.

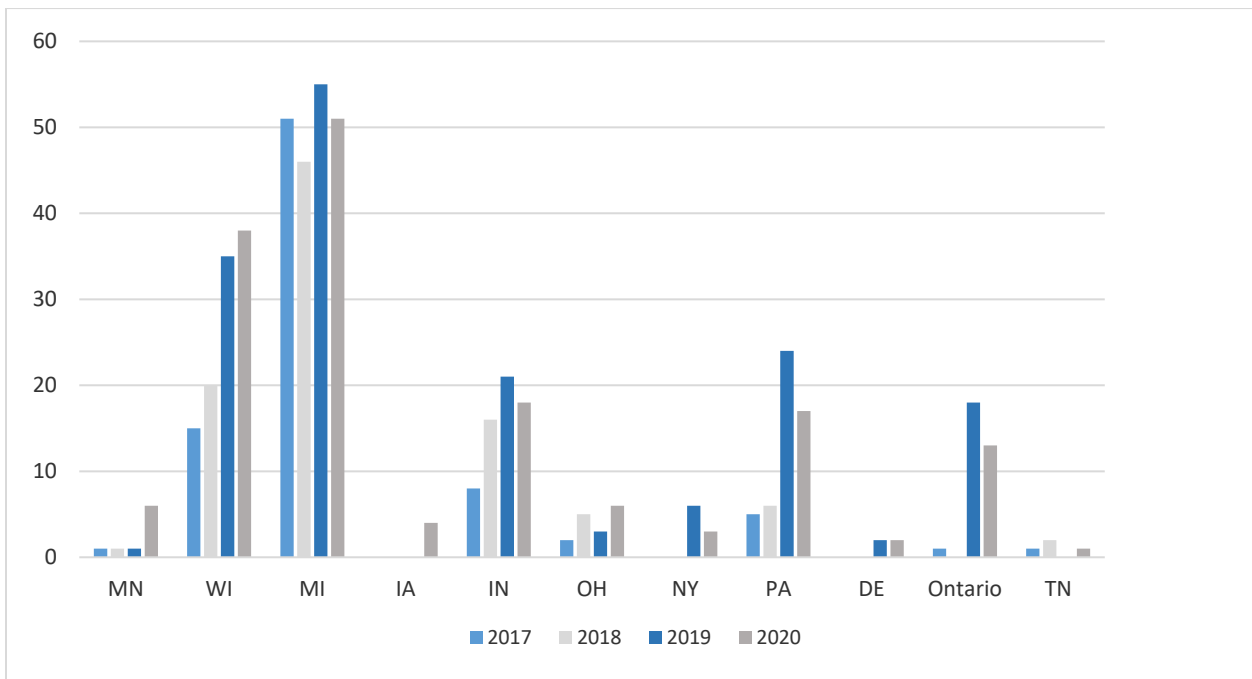


Figure 4. The average number of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes at each site in 2017 - 2020.

