



February 9, 2024

Senator Southerland
Chairman, Senate Energy, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
722 Cordell Hull Building
425 5th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37243

RE: Senate Bill 1876 / House Bill 1867; Sandhill Cranes

Position: Oppose

Dear Chairman Southerland and Members of the Senate Energy, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned conservation organizations, we write to express our opposition to SB 1876/HB 1867, which would prohibit the hunting of sandhill cranes in Tennessee. Regulated hunting poses no population-level threat to sandhill crane conservation, and there is no scientific support for ending the Tennessee sandhill crane season. We therefore respectfully encourage you to oppose these bills.

Thanks to science-based management and the tens of millions of dollars per year that hunters generate for wildlife management through the “user pays – public benefits” structure of the American System of Conservation Funding, the sandhill crane population has increased to historic levels and continues to grow. Data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) shows that:

- While sandhill cranes were nearly extinct by 1930, with fewer than 200 birds in the United States, there are now an estimated 1.4 million sandhill cranes.
- The Eastern population of sandhill cranes growth rate is 4% per year.
- The harvest rate of sandhill cranes over the past several years in Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee has been less than ~1% of the USFWS’s conservative fall flight index; and
- As sandhill crane populations grow, human-wildlife conflicts, including crop depredation, continue to increase causing millions of dollars of damage every year.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is widely recognized as the most successful wildlife conservation model in the world. A key tenet of the North American Model is that wildlife policy is formulated through the best available science. SB 1876/HB1867 have no scientific backing and would limit opportunities for the sportsmen and women in Tennessee whose conservation funding dollars support sandhill crane management.

Our organizations recognize that recreational hunting continues to be one of the most effective and cost-efficient methods of wildlife management. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and its Commission, which work in lockstep with the USFWS and the Mississippi Flyway Council to manage migratory birds in Tennessee, should continue to be the primary wildlife management authorities.

Sandhill crane hunting is sustainable and highly regulated by the TWRA through a limited quota tag draw system to ensure harvest levels do not exceed harvest management goals. Hunters are required to tag each harvested sandhill crane and report the harvest to the TWRA. Hunters must also complete a post-season survey regardless of whether they hunted or harvested a sandhill crane. Additionally, sandhill hunters are annually required to pass a crane identification test to improve the ability to distinguish between sandhill cranes and other species.

In 2021 alone, Tennessee's sportsmen and women generated over \$60.96 million for state-based conservation.¹ Moreover, hunters in Tennessee support 9,200 jobs, \$365,000,000 in salaries and wages, and \$56,000,000 in state and local taxes, with a total economic effect of \$1,105,000,000.²

Again, we respectfully encourage you to oppose SB 1876/HB 1867.

Thank you for considering our comments, and please let us know if we can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

Conner Barker, Southeastern States Coordinator, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Cyrus Baird, Senior Director of Government Affairs, Delta Waterfowl

Bee Frederick, State and Local Liaison, Safari Club International

Horace Tipton, Director of Conservation Policy, Tennessee Wildlife Federation

¹ https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/26011649/Tennessee_ASCF_Fact_Sheet_2022.pdf

² <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.25/ukk.058.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020-Economic-Impact-of-Hunting-and-Shooting-Technical-Report-V2.pdf>