

# Mississippi Sandhill Crane

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



**Al Shriver, Refuge Manager**  
Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR  
7200 Crane Lane  
Gautier, MS 39553-2500  
Phone: 228/497 6322  
Fax: 228/497 5407  
E-mail:  
FW4RWMSSandhillCrane@fws.gov

### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1975.
- Acres: 20,000, Jackson County, three major units (Ocean Springs 9,000, Gautier 9,000 and Fontainebleau 2,000).
- Other management: FMHA tracts and conservation easements equal 2,500 acres.
- Location: the headquarters/visitor's center is located one-half mile north of I-10, exit 61, on the Gautier-Vancleave Road.

### Natural History

- Refuge occupies 20,000 acres of pine/savanna habitat interspersed with bayheads, cypress, rivers and marsh in the coastal plain of Mississippi.
- Approximately 110 endangered Sandhill cranes inhabit the refuge.
- Wildlife species include grassland and open forest birds such as Henslow and Bachman's sparrows, loggerhead shrike, redheaded woodpeckers, kites, birds of prey, wading birds, gopher tortoise and various turtles, snakes, deer, fox, armadillo, bobcat, alligator and more.
- Global Important Bird Area designated by American Bird Conservancy.
- Much of the refuge is encompassed by pine/savanna habitat. Water bodies such as Perigal Bayou, Old Fort Bayou, Bayou Castelle and Bluff Creek flow through various units of the refuge.

### Financial Impact of the Refuge

- Six permanent staff, one contract employee and seven seasonal fire fighters.
- Approximately 3300 visitors annually.

- Numerous local schools and tour buses utilize refuge for educational purposes.
- Current budget (FY 02) \$394,500.

### Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat and protection for endangered Mississippi Sandhill cranes.
- Protect and preserve unique and highly diverse savanna plant communities utilized by cranes.
- Provide environmental education, interpretation and wildlife-oriented recreation to refuge visitors.

### Management Tools

- Crane recovery-population monitoring, egg switching, captive bird releases, predator control, and law enforcement.
- Habitat restoration.
- Prescribed burning.
- Mechanical vegetation manipulation.
- Noxious plant management.
- Wildland fire suppression assistance to state and local agencies.
- Education\interpretation.

### Public Use Opportunities

- 3/4-mile plant identification nature trail.
- Wildlife exhibits/video.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildflower viewing.
- Photography.

### Calendar of Events

**January/February:** Crane viewing tours by reservation.

**May:** Mississippi Sandhill Crane Festival.

### Questions and Answers

# Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge

*Why are Mississippi Sandhill cranes an endangered species in Mississippi and they are hunted in Texas?*

The Mississippi Sandhill crane is a separate and distinct subspecies which is non-migratory and on the brink of extinction. There were only 30 to 40 cranes left in the 1950's and 1960's. Now the free flying population is around 110. The subspecies in Texas is migratory and sustains a huntable population level.

*Why is hunting not allowed on the refuge?*

Authorizing legislation in establishing the refuge specifically states recovery of endangered species as the primary purpose of the refuge. All other uses must be compatible with that purpose.

*What is the primary purpose of the Mississippi Sandhill Crane Refuge?*

The primary purpose of the refuge is to restore crane habitat, protect the cranes and their habitat from disturbance, and provide information, education, and wildlife observation opportunities to refuge visitors and members of the community.

*What good is this refuge for other than protecting endangered cranes?*

In addition to protecting the highly endangered Mississippi Sandhill cranes, this refuge consists of highly productive habitats, i.e. pine savannas, bayhead forest, etc., that provide food, cover, and nesting opportunities for many other wildlife species of which some are threatened and endangered. In addition this refuge provides excellent public recreation and educational opportunities. A nature trail provides hiking, photography and wildlife observation. About 2,500 people visit the refuge each year. Local schools utilize the refuge for outdoor classrooms. Refuge personnel often speak to these groups about environmental matters.

*Does the use of fire on the refuge harm wildlife?*

Fire used in the right manner is a very valuable wildlife management tool. It plays an integral role in the recovery of the Sandhill crane by helping to restore and maintain the highly productive savanna habitats. Unique pitcher plant bog growth is greatly stimulated by fire. Controlled fires can convert low productive thick dead undergrowth into succulent green vegetation that is utilized by many wildlife species such as deer, turkey, quail and rabbit. Management for other threatened and endangered species such as the gopher tortoise is largely achieved with fire.

The fire program at the refuge is very large. It provides technical training and support to local fire departments and provides equipment and/or burning expertise to cooperators such as The Nature Conservancy, Stennis Space Center, the State of Mississippi and other refuges in Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky and Mississippi.

*How can I become involved in refuge activities?*

Join our Friends Group by calling Leah Bray, President at 228/872 9710. The \$10 annual dues helps support refuge projects and can be mailed to the group at the refuge address.