

A LANDSCAPE PERSPECTIVE OF WHOOPING CRANE MIGRATION THROUGH NEBRASKA: CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: Past and current discussions of conservation of whooping crane (*Grus americana*) stopover habitat in Nebraska have long been focused on the Platte River. We evaluated the distribution of whooping crane stopover sites in Nebraska in a broader context to (a) determine the distribution of whooping crane stopover sites on the Platte River relative to other landscapes and (b) use whooping migratory behavior data to systematically define and explain patterns of stopover clusters. The distribution of stopover clusters suggests rainwater basin wetlands and the Platte River may be used interchangeably by migrating whooping cranes. The Rainwater Basin and Platte River appear to be particularly significant for spring north migrating cranes as there appears to be a void of wetlands between Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuges in Kansas. We propose that whooping crane conservation and management actions in Nebraska must take a broader landscape perspective to include the Platte River plus the entire area required for whooping cranes to travel during a day. This perspective suggests that we focus conservation and management activities on a 320-km wide and approximately 240-km long area centered on the Central Valley of the Platte River. We present a strategy to focus conservation and management actions to maximize the availability of whooping crane stopover habitat in south-central Nebraska.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP 10:160

Key words: *Grus americana*, migration, Nebraska, Platte River, Rainwater Basin, stopover habitat, whooping crane.
