

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Greater Sandhill Crane
Region: 3 – Pacific Flyway
Hunting District: 390-01 permit area
Year: 2020

- Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).** See Table 1 for special license and harvest history.

The proposal is to increase the number of available 390-01 sandhill crane licenses from 20 to 25 and to allow successful applicants to receive two sandhill crane licenses.

Current:

390-01: 20 licenses. Valid only in Broadwater County.

- Sept 1 – Oct 27 – Bag and Possession limit: 1 Sandhill Crane.

Proposed (Dates subject to change):

390-01: 25 licenses. Valid only in Broadwater County.

- Sept 1 – Oct 27 – Bag and Possession limit: 2 Sandhill Crane. Successful applicants will receive two Sandhill Crane licenses.

Table1. Estimated greater sandhill crane harvest in Broadwater County (390-01) license area.

Year	Applicants	# Permitted Hunters	# Permits issued	Total estimated crane harvest	% Success per permit
				HD 390-01	
2019	64	20	20	6	30
2018	35	20	20	6	30
2017	28	10	10	3	30
2016	35	10	10	6	60
2015	26	10	10	5	50
2014	24	10	10	5	50
2013	15	10	10	5	50
2012	15	10	10	4	40
Ave	30	13	13	5	42.5

Note: 2012 was first year of sandhill crane hunting in this permit area.

- What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of the proposed change is to increase the amount of harvest and harvest opportunity for sandhill cranes in the Broadwater County permit area which will hopefully result in an increase in sandhill crane harvest in the area.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Harvest success on the licenses will be monitored through the regular sandhill crane harvest survey.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The USFWS's nationwide objective for the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of greater sandhill cranes is 17,000 – 21,000 birds. The total number of greater sandhill cranes surveyed in 2019 was 21,290 – a couple of areas weren't even surveyed. A portion of the RMP is found in Montana during the fall hunting season. Montana's greater sandhill crane harvest has typically been well below the maximum amount allocated to the state (been around the low to mid 30 percentiles of its allocated annual crane harvest in recent years). There is no specific objective for the number of sandhill cranes found in the Townsend/Toston area during the fall hunting season. No survey was flown in Broadwater County in 2019 due to a combination of weather and pilot availability. A total of 602 cranes were observed during the last survey (2018) in the Townsend/Toston survey area. See Table 1 for past survey information.

Table 1: Greater sandhill crane survey results for the Townsend/Toston survey area.

Year	Number
2018	602
2017	593
2016	660
2015	861
2014	482
2013	519
2012	540
2011	419
2010	532
2009	623
2008	631
2007	644
2006	573
2005	577
2004	544
LT Ave	587
'04-'18	

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

For a number of years almost all the cranes were found on only one landowner's property which was one of the reasons for keeping the number of permits fairly low for a number of years since their inception in 2012. However, the number of properties on which sandhill cranes are found in the Townsend/Toston area during our annual fall survey has increased in recent years. Most of the landowners that have sandhill cranes on their property during the fall allow sandhill crane hunting on their properties.

This proposal will increase sandhill crane hunting opportunity by increasing the number of permitted applicants and by allowing successful individuals to receive two licenses.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Most of the landowners contacted that have sandhill cranes (SHC) on their properties during the fall hunting season were okay with increasing the harvest opportunity for sandhill cranes (SHC). One landowner doesn't allow SHC hunting because he has cattle in that area during the fall. Given the increased number of SHC hunting applicants in recent years, it's expected that hunters would be supportive of the proposal. Given that the proposed changes will still have a pretty limited impact on both the local SHC population and Montana's overall SHC population, there is expected to be little to no opposition to the proposal. The local Townsend game warden, Josh Leonard, was supportive of the proposal.

Submitted by: Adam Grove, Wildlife Biologist - Townsend

Date: March 3, 2020

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: