

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## WHOOPING CRANE CRITICAL HABITAT DETERMINED

Nine areas which are primarily Federal lands in seven States have been determined to be critical habitat for the endangered whooping crane, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The rulemaking, being published in the May 15, 1978, Federal Register, means that these areas are now afforded protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Section 7 of that Act states that no Federal agency can authorize, fund, or carry out any project which adversely affects the critical habitat of any endangered or threatened species.

Delineating the specific areas will assist Federal agencies in knowing where their responsibilities may apply. The designations, however, are not comparable to establishment of wilderness areas or wildlife refuges. No legal jurisdiction is assumed, and no prohibition of a particular activity is made. The designation of critical habitat does not affect the actions of private landowners or State or local governments. The only specific effect of this rulemaking is that Federal agencies will have to evaluate their actions with regard to the requirements of Section 7 of the Act. The Service believes many kinds of actions in the designated areas would not be detrimental.

During migration the cranes require roosting areas within relatively undisturbed wetlands. Whooping cranes can find food in the wide variety

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of habitats found in the Central Flyway of the United States, although wetland areas are apparently preferred.

Most of the areas determined to be critical habitat for the whooper occur on national wildlife refuges. They include: the areas in and around the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas--the major wintering ground for the Canadian flock of whoopers; Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Idaho--the hatching site for the transplanted whooping crane eggs; and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico--the main wintering area for the whooping cranes produced at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Four other areas designated as critical habitat are areas regularly used by the Canadian flock during their spring and fall migrations between the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada's Northwest Territories. They are: Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma; Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms State Waterfowl Management Area, both in Kansas; and 55 linear miles of State and privately owned Platte River bottoms between Lexington and Shelton, Nebraska. The Service originally proposed a much larger area in this Nebraska region as critical habitat but reduced the final designation in the light of public comments received.

All major migration stop-over points for the Rocky Mountain or transplanted flock were found to be on national wildlife refuges. Two refuges in Colorado were designated because of their use by the migrating cranes between Idaho and New Mexico: Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge.

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