

The DNR began a trumpeter swan recovery program in 1987 in cooperation with the Milwaukee County Zoo and other agencies and organizations. The trumpeter swan was listed as a state endangered species in 1989 and Wisconsin began the first year of an eight-year program to collect trumpeter swan eggs in Alaska that were artificially incubated and hatched at the Milwaukee County Zoo and then released. Wisconsin's original recovery goal was to achieve a population of at least 20 breeding and migratory pairs by the year 2000. In 2009, biologists counted a record 183 trumpeter swan nests in 23 counties and the trumpeter swan was removed from the state endangered species list. In 2011, biologists counted 191 nesting pairs of trumpeter swans in Wisconsin.

Whooping cranes

The whooping crane is the tallest North American bird. It has a long neck, long dark pointed bill, and long thin black legs. A large crane can stand up to 5 feet tall with a wing span of over 6 feet. Biologists believe that approximately 1,400 whooping cranes existed in 1860. Their population declined because of hunting and habitat loss until 1941 when the last migrating flock dwindled to an all-time low of 15 birds.

Since 1999, Wisconsin has played a major role in efforts to restore a migratory whooping crane population in eastern North America as a founding member of the Whooping

Crane Eastern Partnership (exit DNR), a large group of nine government and private sector organizations, with the mission of restoring a second self-sustaining migratory population, with a core breeding area in Wisconsin. Prior to these restoration efforts, only one migratory population of whooping cranes existed in the wild that winters on the Gulf coast of Texas and migrates north in spring nesting in on the border of Alberta and Northwest Territories in Canada. Any catastrophic event in this area could have completely eliminated the species.

Two release methods are being used to rebuild the population. Initially, all captive-reared crane chicks were conditioned to follow an ultralight aircraft from central Wisconsin to the Gulf coast of Florida. These birds then make the return and subsequent migrations south unaided. This program was supplemented with the direct release of crane chicks into groups of whooping or sandhill cranes in central Wisconsin.

Including juvenile cranes expected to be reintroduced this fall, biologists estimate there are 115 cranes in the Wisconsin to Florida flock and a total whooping crane population of 599.

The unintentional shooting of a protected swan can result in state fines and restitution costs exceeding \$2,000. The state penalty for intentionally shooting a whooping crane is a fine not less than \$2,000 nor more

than \$5,000 or imprisonment for not more than nine months or both. In addition, violators face a three year revocation of all hunting privileges. Federal penalties can be substantially higher.

"Hunters have done a great job in learning the differences between swans and geese," Matteson said. "But with the growing number of swans in the state, we want to remind them to continue to be vigilant in identifying their game."

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Van Haren (608) 266-3244.

Duck season opens Sept. 24 in Wisconsin's Northern and Mississippi River zones

Hunters looking forward to the opening of Wisconsin's 2011 duck season in the Northern duck zone and new Mississippi River Zone on Sept. 24 should find good numbers of ducks, according to state wildlife officials.

The duck hunt in the northern zone opens at 9 a.m. Sept. 24 and continues through Nov. 22. The new Mississippi river zone, which was requested by duck hunters, also opens on Sept. 24 and runs through Oct. 2, followed by a 12-day split (closure), reopening on Oct. 15 and running until Dec. 4. Aside from opening day, hunting hours begin 30 minutes before sunrise. The southern zone duck season opens at 9 a.m. on Oct. 1 through Oct. 9, and