

For Immediate Release January 5, 2012

Ultra-light-led Migration of Whooping Cranes on Hold in Alabama

The 2011-2012 ultra-light led migration of whooping cranes in the eastern population is currently on hold in Alabama.

The Service's partner managing this portion of the effort, Operation Migration, is cooperating with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to resolve regulatory issues about the flight. The group has applied for a waiver to exempt them from the FAA regulation that prohibits compensating pilots of this category of aircraft. This waiver, if approved, would allow the flight to continue.

Nine young whooping cranes began their first migration from Wisconsin following the ultra-lights in the fall of 2011. Operation Migration began leading sandhill cranes as a study group in 2000, and has been piloting ultra-light aircraft to successfully lead whooping cranes on an Eastern Migratory route each year since 2001. The FAA instituted the Light Sport Aircraft category in 2008.

The many international partners in the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP), are monitoring developments and hope for a speedy resolution on the waiver.

“WCEP is considering alternatives for the whooping cranes if approval of a waiver is significantly delayed,” said Peter Fasbender, Field Project Leader for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Green Bay Ecological Services Field Office in New Franken, Wisconsin. “Options could include releasing the cranes at nearby refuges, or possibly transporting them to release sites in Florida at St. Marks and Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuges.”

The whooping cranes are safe inside protective enclosures during the delay. The migration has a traditional operations pause in December to allow the crew to return home for the holidays.

For more information, visit: http://www.operationmigration.org/Field_Journal.html

Contacts:

FAA: Lynn Lunsford, 817-222-4455, Lynn.Lunsford@faa.gov

FWS: Peter J. Fasbender, 920-866-1725, Peter_fasbender@fws.gov
Tom MacKenzie, 404-679-7291, tom_mackenzie@fws.gov
Chuck Traxler, 612-713-5313, Chuck_Traxler@fws.gov

Operation Migration: David Sakrison, 920-748-6125