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INGRID BARCELÓ,

University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust

JULIA RIVERA LÓPEZ

Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua

FELIPE CHÁVEZ-RAMÍREZ

University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust

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RURAL INHABITANT PERCEPTIONS OF SANDHILL CRANES IN NORTHERN MEXICO WINTERING AREAS

INGRID BARCELÓ, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust, 6611 West Whooping Crane Drive, Wood River, NE 68883, USA

JULIA RIVERA LÓPEZ, Facultad de Zootecnia, Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, Av. Escorza 900, Chihuahua 31000, Chihuahua, Mexico

FELIPE CHÁVEZ-RAMÍREZ, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust, 6611 West Whooping Crane Drive, Wood River, NE 68883, USA

Abstract: While a large proportion of the sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*) population winters in northern Mexico, little information is available regarding conservation status of wetlands and human dimension issues. We conducted preliminary interviews of rural inhabitants living near wetlands used by cranes in 3 Mexican estates. One hundred percent of interviewees affirmed to know cranes, see them regularly (100%), and were capable of describing cranes. Winter is the time most have seen cranes (78%) with fall being second (20%). Most cranes were observed in lakes (56%), agriculture fields (35%), and cattle troughs (2%). Most responded to have seen 0-100 cranes (41%), while larger numbers were reported by smaller percentages. Most interviewees believed cranes eat corn (66%), oats (21%), sorghum (5%), and others items including wheat, insects, and cow droppings (2% each). Foraging was observed in agriculture fields (83%) with less in lakes (15%). Most did not know where cranes came from (71%), while smaller percentages said Canada (24%) and the United States (2%). A majority (58%) said they were not affected by the arrival of cranes, but 43% said they were. The negative effects were described as destroyed crops (31%), eating corn (23%), and diminished production. Those affected said they could implement scare tactics (70%), while others suggested harvesting on time (5%), checking crops regularly (5%), and hunting as possible solutions. Most (90%) said they did not hunt the cranes, 5% mentioned they used to and 3% said they still hunt them. These results offer a glimpse of the attitudes of rural inhabitants in northern Mexico towards cranes.

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Key words: attitudes, *Grus canadensis*, Mexico, rural, sandhill crane.
