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WINTERING SANDHILL CRANE DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT USE PATTERNS AT BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEW MEXICO

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Abstract: The single most important factor regulating sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*) populations is their ability to carry out annual life cycle events while responding to changing habitat availability and distribution across local, regional, and continental landscapes. Wetland and cropland resource availability and distribution across the landscape have become increasingly unpredictable. Recent changes in farming practices, urbanization, and prevailing drought conditions in New Mexico have transformed and reduced dynamic, heterogeneous landscapes into scattered fragments of the original setting. Concerns are increasing for the cumulative influence of these often irreversible actions in providing the type of resources needed by cranes at the right time in their annual cycle, in the right form, and in the right quantities to ensure their continued success. The distributional patterns of wintering sandhill cranes have not been assessed relative to the type, distribution, and availability of foraging habitats important to cranes. Local and regional management plans have placed a high priority on the need for information that identifies and assesses the distribution and patterns of use by sandhill cranes across their range, in light of a changing landscape through land use change and urbanization.

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Key words: distribution, *Grus canadensis*, New Mexico, sandhill crane, winter.
