

**NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD AGENDA ITEM**

**SUBJECT:** Information item - Public involvement and development of Wisconsin's Double-crested Cormorant Management Plan and Population Objectives.

**FOR:** SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Jeff Pritzl, Regional Wildlife Supervisor

**SUMMARY:**

In order to gather public input on the proposed Double-crested Cormorant Management Plan and Population Objectives, we propose holding hearings in Green Bay and Madison in September.

A Wisconsin Cormorant Team consisting of wildlife management, endangered resources and fisheries staff recommends a goal of no more than 5,000 nests in four distinct colonies on the northern Door County Islands. A goal of no more than 1,000 nests is recommended on Cat Island in lower Green Bay. No population management is needed at this time on the Mississippi River, Lake Superior, or the interior of Wisconsin.

Currently, cormorant management by the DNR takes place under a USFWS Public Resources Depredation Order. If increased management is to take place, however, Wisconsin must conduct an Environmental Assessment of cormorant management. State population goals for cormorants and a management plan must be in place before the Environmental Assessment can be developed.

Double-crested cormorant numbers have expanded tremendously across North America over the previous 20 years. Most states and provinces in the Great Lakes region have found it necessary to manage cormorants due to concerns about impacts on public resources including fish stocks, co-nesting waterbird populations, and protection of unique island vegetative habitats.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This item is informational. No action is needed.

**LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:**

- |    |                                     |   |     |                                     |          |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|-----|-------------------------------------|----------|
| No | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fiscal Estimate Required                              | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Attached |
| No | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Environmental Assessment or Impact Statement Required | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Attached |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Background Memo                                       | Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Attached |

**APPROVED:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
Bureau Director, Tom Hauge

\_\_\_\_\_  
8/27/07  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
Administrator, Laurie Osterndorf

\_\_\_\_\_  
8/31/07  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
Secretary, Scott Hassett

\_\_\_\_\_  
8/31/07  
Date

- cc: Laurie J. Ross - AD/5
- Tim Andryk - LS/5
- Signe Holtz - ER/6

- Mike Staggs - FH/3
- Kurt Thiede - LS/5

- Regional Wildlife Supervisors - WM/6 - 5
- Tom Hauge - WM/6

DATE: September 26, 2007 FILE REF: 2300

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Secretary Scott Hassett

SUBJECT: Public input and development of Wisconsin's Double Crested Cormorant Management Plan and Objectives

**Background information:**

Department staff will hold public informational meetings on Wisconsin's Double Crested Cormorant Management Plan and Objectives. These meetings will be held during the month of October.

Double-crested cormorant numbers have expanded tremendously across the North American continent over the previous 20 years. This is presumably due to a reduction in exposure to environmental toxins that were interfering with reproduction, and an increase of forage fish populations in the Great Lakes Basin and aquaculture facilities in wintering areas located in the lower Mississippi River states. Most states and provinces in the Great Lakes region have found it necessary to initiate cormorant population control due to concerns about impacts on public resources including fish stocks, co-nesting waterbird populations, and protection of unique island vegetative habitats.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has issued a Public Resources Depredation Order (PRDO) which allows certain federal, state, and tribal agencies to take action to control cormorants where public resource damage can be documented, and cormorant management can be shown to abate damage to the resource. Most states in the region have also conducted Environmental Assessments of cormorant management that have demonstrated a need to take action beyond that approved under the USFWS PRDO. Wisconsin has not conducted this Environmental Assessment. In order to do so, Wisconsin must first establish management objectives for cormorants in Wisconsin.

**Plan Development:**

A Wisconsin Cormorant Team consisting of DNR staff from Wildlife Management, Endangered Resources and Fisheries Management was assembled in 2002 to address the development of the USFWS PRDO, and interact with agencies and stakeholders to initiate cormorant management under the PRDO. This team has developed the following proposed population goals for Wisconsin breeding cormorants.

**Double Crested Cormorant Management Plan Objectives:**

Cormorant population status and proposed objectives for Wisconsin are broken into five geographic areas which are listed below. Currently almost 90% of the state's cormorant breeding population occurs in Lake Michigan waters associated with Green Bay and the Door Peninsula. Cormorant numbers in the remainder of the state are stable to declining, so recommended population control objectives are directed only at certain Lake Michigan breeding colonies at this time. Control techniques include egg oiling, nest destruction, and/or shooting cormorants. It is the position of the cormorant team that new colonies should not be allowed/encouraged in the Green Bay or Door Peninsula management areas. We also do not want to cause the abandonment of existing colony locations. Management should be directed at reducing cormorant breeding numbers without causing colony abandonment, which may increase the likelihood of cormorants pioneering new breeding sites in the area.

A. Northern Door County Islands:

- Currently 10,000 nests at 4 distinct colonies.
- Recommend an objective of 5,000 nests at 4 distinct colonies; no less than 500 nests at any one of the colonies
- Prevent DCCO nesting at any additional islands

B. Cat Island, Lower Green Bay:

- Currently 2,100 nests
- Recommend an objective of 1,000 nests on Cat Island
- Prevent DCCO nesting at any additional islands

C. Lake Superior (currently just Apostle Islands):

- Currently < 500 nests
- No population management required

D. Mississippi River:

- Currently < 20 nests
- No population management required

E. Interior Wisconsin:

- Currently 1,100 nests
- No population management required
- \*50% of the interior population resides at a young colony in Millers Bay on Lake Winnebago. This colony may need to be separated from the remainder of the interior population and an objective population established if resource concerns are identified.

**Public Meetings:**

The department proposes holding informational meetings in the cities of Green Bay and Madison in October. We will review the public comments gathered at these meetings, make needed revisions, and bring a final cormorant management plan for your approval in January.

**Environmental Analysis:**

Upon approval of the final management plan, we will prepare an environmental analysis of the proposed population control actions in order to meet the federal requirements for such actions.

**Implementation**

When the management plan and environmental analysis are completed, we will seek USFWS authorization to begin the population control activities outlined in the plan. The level of control activities will be governed by available funding and could begin in 2008.