

**SEPA #: 25-009 Methow Big Valley Sandhill Crane Closure**

**Comment Period:** February 24<sup>th</sup> – March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Comment Category	General Comments	WDFW Response
<p><b>Support the closure</b></p>	<p>I'm writing this as a citizen and am not representing WDFW in these comments. Please protect the Sandhill Cranes. Federally, I am worried about endangered species' habitats being threatened by the loss of federal funding and federal workers. Washington can hold strong in protecting endangered species with the implementation on this proposal. I understand these birds are migratory, but I believe the cranes return to their breeding grounds each year like many other migratory birds. Please pass this proposal. Thank you.</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> Washington is home to a population of around 100 adult and sub-adult birds with about 40 breeding pairs of Sandhill Cranes throughout the state. With one of these pairs being documented in the Methow Valley. Being that all three subspecies – greater, lesser, and Canadian Sandhill Cranes are listed as State Endangered it is our responsibility to ensure that critical wetland and nesting habitat is protected from human disturbance. The Big Valley Unit offers ideal habitat to continue to support the nesting pair of sandhill cranes. The funding and acquisition of the Big Valley Unit was predominantly to protect riparian habitat along the Methow River while also providing a migratory corridor for wildlife. It is our</p>
	<p>I believe this is a good practice. Wildlife set asides need to be just that, set aside...for the good of the wildlife. Human encroachment into wildlife areas is directly detrimental to the species the areas are meant to protect.</p>	
	<p>I support the seasonal closure of this land to protect the endangered Sandhill Cranes. But more needs to be done to help their recovery. Some barb-wire fencing has been removed and a stretch flagged. All cattle grazing on this land should be stopped and the remaining fencing removed. Also, a crop of</p>	

	<p>grain could easily be seeded this spring to help feed returning adults and young. Thanks.</p>	<p>responsibility to limit human disturbance within this area as needed to conserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife populations. WDFW greatly appreciates your support in our conservation efforts.</p>
	<p>Dear Fish &amp; Wildlife Representatives and all responsible for this wonderful proposal...Bravo and thank you. A lengthy protection sounds very well advised. Please continue protecting all living things as required to ensure their piece and tranquility.</p>	
	<p>I support closing this area temporarily to support the cranes. They should be protected.</p>	
	<p>I support the seasonal closures. Sandhill cranes need large open spaces to support their migration and should not be put at undue risk of being disturbed by human activities.</p>	
	<p>I support the closure of the Methow Valley Wildlife Area's Big Valley Unit from April 17 - September 30th for the protection of the Sandhill Cranes.</p>	
	<p>I support closing this small area to foster and protect the breeding sandhills. It is a tiny fragment of the total to close considering how much man has taken and over runs for his enjoyment and use. When things have a slight chance of returning, the chance should be jumped on.</p>	
	<p>It is vital that we use public wildlife lands for protecting species that are threatened or endangered. This proposed closure is important for sandhill crane protection.</p>	

	<p>Please close the area as proposed. I can only hope that the public will be respectful of the closure when it happens.</p>	
	<p>I support the closure of 240 acres. I have thousands and thousands of acres nearby I can access. I won't miss this 240-acre parcel.</p>	
	<p>I support the Sandhill Crane nesting/rearing season closure of this wildlife area. Increasing available nesting/rearing habitat enhances population resilience in a time of potential habitat alteration or loss due to climate change.</p>	
	<p>I support the Sandhill Crane nesting/rearing season closure of this wildlife area. The public has a responsibility to ensure species at risk have areas available to safely breed their offspring. The area proposed is 240 acres and does not include 7 other units in the Methow Valley Wilderness Area</p>	
	<p>I support the recommended Methow Big Valley Sandhill Crane Closure. I've done some birding in that area and have been surprised at the number of off-leash dogs that are allowed to run in nesting habitat. Posting a sign that dogs must be on a leash is not going to solve this problem. The area should be closed to any incursion, human and canine, during the nesting period.</p>	
	<p>I support the recommended closure and hope that there will be the opportunity for</p>	

	<p>additional enforcement of the closure rather than just relying on signage. That area has a significant number of off leash dogs despite signage. I am not anti-dog and am in fact a dog owner but I do not support owners who do not feel the rules apply to them.</p>	
	<p>I support this closure to protect endangered wildlife. We live in a wilderness with thousands of other trails and areas available to us. Living in this place means protecting the fish, wildlife and habitats that make it special.</p>	
	<p>I have had a little experience with sandhill cranes over the last 47 years.  At Grays Lake NWR where I worked in the 70s, one study found pairs defended territories of about 50 acres. This was high density nesting area with dozens of nests in close proximity.  My most recent experience was on the Alaska peninsula where hundreds of pairs nest annually. There, brood rearing territory size on endless suitable habitat (wet tundra) was maybe 200+ acres and pairs were tolerant of other pairs.  In our case here - it seems the goal is to provide refuge from human generated disturbance to allow successful colt rearing. Closing a 240 acre portion of the WILDLIFE area to aid the successfully</p>	

	<p>rearing of young rare sandhill cranes seems to me to be perfectly in line with the objectives for which the area was acquired. I have spent lots of hours watching the cranes here for the last four years, and they have used all of the area proposed. Keeping dogs and horses and humans from sharing that area during the breeding and colt-rearing season will provide an extra sense of security while the parents try to fend off predators, not always successfully.</p>	
	<p>We fully support this closure to protect endangered wildlife. We live in this Valley and enjoy the beauty of the Big Valley area all year long. We have not been negatively impacted by similar closures to protect these birds in recent years and have no reason to think this year will be any different, nor any reason to oppose this. Protect these wonderful birds!</p>	
	<p>As a frequent tourist to the area, I am in full support of this closure. This is exactly what wildlife areas are for, and I hope the sandhill population in the area is able to expand.</p>	
	<p>I appreciate the thorough, well-written DNS and the opportunity to comment. From my perspective as a user of the Big Valley Unit, your determination that "this proposal will not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment" makes sense. I support the closure.</p>	
	<p>Highly support, people can go anywhere, wildlife can't!; Fully Support, Thank you!</p>	

	<p>I support WDFW closure of lands from April 17-Sept. 30th for nesting Sandhill Cranes. Closing the area to human and off-leash canines provides the nesting birds some protection to raise their young. The first year the cranes nested, one or more of the hatchlings succumbed to natural predation. Any protection given to the Sandhill Cranes will hopefully insure their survival and continued nesting in the Methow Valley. While closing this area off is an inconvenience to residents and visitors, I believe it is what the WDFW should be doing, providing a place for wildlife and ensuring their continued survival.</p>	
	<p>As a Methow Valley resident, I fully support this closure</p>	
	<p>I am 100% for this temporary closure to protect and promote wildlife rehabilitation, especially since there are other equivalent areas that can be explored. This will allow wildlife to recover so we have a healthier ecosystem to enjoy in the future.</p>	
	<p>Absolutely! I am all for closing a protected habitat during a critical time. Hopefully this</p>	

	<p>one pair will result in many pairs in years to come. Thank you</p>	
	<p>I support the closure of wetlands section of Big Valley to remain off limits for the Sandhill Cranes. It's DFW job to prioritize wildlife conservation over recreation. I also encourage WDFW to renew the lease for farming the field along H20, Bluebird Grains help upgraded the field irrigation system, reestablishing the viability of agriculture and should be allowed back.</p>	
	<p>I support this temporary, strategic public access closure to protect species and critical habitats. The Methow is fortunate to have a nesting pair of sandhill cranes and suitable habitats are worth protecting to promote population improvement and long-term viability.</p>	
	<p>I support this temporary closure.</p>	
	<p>I strongly support this closure! There are only 3 places in the state where sandhills have been documented breeding and this is one of them. This area has become a hot bed of mountain bikers and off leash dogs. Let's prioritize wildlife not recreation on our WILDLIFE AREAS! ; I strongly support this closure! There are only 3 places in the state where sandhills</p>	

	<p>have been documented breeding and this is one of them. This area has become a hot bed of mountain bikers and off leash dogs. Let's prioritize wildlife not recreation on our WILDLIFE AREAS!</p>	
	<p>I support this closure to help protect the nesting Sandhill cranes.</p>	
	<p>This closure would protect these birds during vulnerable nesting season</p>	
	<p>Dear WDFW staff,</p> <p>It's been exciting to see the Big Valley crane family from afar, and just to know that they have been able to nest successfully in the Methow Valley in recent years. I appreciate very much the time and effort local retired biologists have given to this effort, and am very grateful that our local public lands have helped this species make a comeback here.</p> <p>The sharing of this success story has also been a wonderful teaching opportunity for our local students to think about the challenges wildlife face, and how humans can help by giving them the privacy they need.</p> <p>Thank you very much for this chance to comment on this project!</p>	



	<p>I am in strong favor of continuing the seasonal closure to protect the nesting Sandhill Cranes at Big Valley. It is wonderful that they have chosen to nest at Big Valley. We should do everything possible to protect them from unnecessary disturbance during their breeding period. Please continue the seasonal closure at Big Valley.</p>	
	<p>Washington Department of Fish &amp; Wildlife:</p> <p>I agree with the Sandhill Crane proposed closure in the Big Valley - Methow Wildlife area. I also agree with closing the proposed area from April 30th - September 30th, 2025. They are highly endangered. We need to maintain wildlife diversity to balance nature for natures sake not for human wishes.</p>	
	<p>I am in favor of the closure for the sandhill cranes. They need all the help that they can get.</p>	
	<p>These iconic birds deserve to have a protected space. So far there is only one identified breeding pair in Methow Valley, but if successful they will begin to recolonize and attract other nesting pairs. This activity will be</p>	

	<p>highly beneficial to WA State endangered Sandhill populations.</p> <p>As a charter member of the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival, <a href="https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org">https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org</a>, I have seen how increasing wildlife viewing opportunities can help local agricultural and small business economies as well as provide for wildlife ecosystems.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.</p>	
	<p>Conservation Northwest supports the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) proposal to protect the state-endangered sandhill crane by closing a small portion of the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area during the crane's nesting season. As an organization dedicated to wildlife conservation and habitat connectivity across Washington, Conservation Northwest recognizes the importance of balancing outdoor recreation access with the protection of wildlife species. The Methow Valley provides critical habitat for the sandhill crane and numerous other rare and sensitive species in Washington</p>	

	<p>state, while also providing for unparalleled outdoor recreation access. However, a species such as the sandhill crane requires undisturbed wetland areas for successful nesting and chick-rearing. Given that human activity—including hiking and on-leash or off-leash dogs—can disrupt nesting behavior and lead to displacement or nest failure, we strongly support this temporary seasonal closure as a proactive measure to ensure the cranes’ continued success. At the same time, we recognize the value of public lands for outdoor recreation, a key part of the Methow Valley’s cultural and economic identity. We appreciate that this closure is targeted, temporary, and allows for ample access to the remaining units of the Methow Wildlife Area. This measured approach demonstrates WDFW’s commitment to both conservation and recreation by ensuring long-term species recovery while maintaining recreational opportunities elsewhere in the valley. We commend WDFW for its science-based approach to managing wildlife areas and encourage WDFW to continue its monitoring of the sandhill cranes’ nesting success to inform both future management decisions and the public at large. Public lands should</p>	
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	<p>serve as places where both wildlife and people can ultimately thrive, and this proposal strikes a reasonable balance in achieving that goal. Thank you for your leadership in protecting Washington's native species. We urge WDFW to move forward by implementing this temporary closure to support the recovery of the state's endangered sandhill cranes.</p> <p>Sincerely, Kurt Hellmann Wildlife-Recreation Coexistence, Sr Coordinator Conservation Northwest</p>	
<p><b>Oppose the closure</b></p>	<p>I do not support. closing 240 acres to public access for half the year, for 1 breeding pair of cranes is an overreach. and just setting the stage for precedence, to close other public lands in the future. most wdfw lands purchased and owned get nothing but support from public, because we assume we'll be able to use them, if public can't access these lands, might as well be privately owned. is that where we are headed, state owned private lands. between fires, controlled burns, etc, and now protecting individual species, our public lands are already becoming very limited to access.</p> <p>The reason Sandhill Cranes showed up was due to the farming practices of Bluebird</p>	<p><b>Response:</b> This closure only accounts for roughly 26 percent of the entire Big Valley Unit and only 240 acres of a wildlife area that consists of around 36,000 acres and 8 different units spanning the entire Methow Valley. With a human population that is consistently growing it comes with its own challenges as land managers. One of those challenges being able to find a balance between human recreation and conservation of wildlife populations. Amongst the</p>

	<p>Grain Farms. Management once admitted as much. Once the Cranes arrived, nested and established WDFW put very tight restrictions on the farming allowed in that area, and thus Bluebird did not renew their lease. Nor did WDFW allow Bluebird to help restore the area back to long-term habitat and now it is nothing but a weed bank from nearby grazing allowances. Closing the whole area is one more side-ways reaction to a far bigger problem within the WDFW: Lack of consistency and process. The cranes will soon be gone from the emaciated area, so making a big closure and keeping people out makes little difference but sets a very bad precedent.</p>	<p>wildlife area there has been a significant increase in human presence and thus an increase in human disturbance amongst wildlife inhabiting the lands owned and managed by WDFW. With this in mind it is our duty to ensure that wildlife especially state endangered wildlife are looked after and lands are managed in alignment with wildlife needs.</p>
<p>Do not close 240 acres of public land for ONE PAIR of sandhills</p>		
<p>Sandhill Cranes are not endangered. Thousands upon thousands migrate through Washington state. That one pair were most likely young and basically lost or disoriented. There are many areas to observe them in the state already. Do not shut down a public wildlife area because someone sees a nesting pair. Again, they are not endangered.</p>		

	<p>Please leave our public lands open for public use. The sandhill cranes have been using this area since 2021 and are doing fine with no public access restrictions. The closures will affect many who may soon be required to pay over a 30% increase in license, tag fees, and access permits. This is not the time to burden them with less access to public lands for wildlife that are cohabitating with public lands users.</p>	
	<p>Public lands need to remain open to all user groups.</p>	
	<p>I support closing this WDFW land to protect endangered Sandhill Cranes. But, I believe more could be done to help this species. Some barb-wire fencing has been removed and some flagged. Cattle grazing on this land needs to stop and all fencing removed if we are serious about supporting this bird's come back. Also, a grain crop could be easily sown this spring on a portion of the fields to supply much needed food for returning adults and young. Thanks.</p>	
	<p>I favor temporary closures as need to preserve and hopefully encourage growth and breeding.</p>	

	Non-essential viewing can be scheduled at non-critical times for the public.	
<b>General Statements not clearly supporting or opposing closure</b>	begin rulemaking for the RETURN of the Washington State Spring Black Bear Hunting Season.	<b>Response:</b> Washington is home to a population of around 100 adult and sub-adult birds with about 40 breeding pairs of Sandhill Cranes throughout the state. With one of these pairs being documented in the Methow Valley. Being that all three subspecies – greater, lesser, and Canadian Sandhill Cranes are listed as State Endangered it is our responsibility to ensure that critical wetland and nesting habitat is protected from human disturbance. The Big Valley Unit offers ideal habitat to continue to support the nesting pair of sandhill cranes. The funding and acquisition of the Big Valley Unit was predominantly to protect riparian habitat along the Methow River while also providing a migratory corridor for wildlife. It is our responsibility to limit human
	Why would we protect a species that is fair game a few states south of us? Yes we ate sandhills.. ribeye in the sky.	
	There's roughly a million Sand Hill Cranes in the U. S. and are not endangered depending on where you live. We don't need to spend and regulate our money for something that will never affect us.	
	There has been no Cranes breeding in Washington State since the late 1800's. So why are we taking this project up now? California, Nevada, and Oregon all have nesting Sand Hill Cranes, and Washington is only a resting place for migrating cranes. Let's leave it at that. If all you want is to satisfy private landowners, then think again. If this area was able to propagate nesting cranes, it would have already done so. Stopping human traffic won't help.	

	<p>Half million alone that roost every spring on the Platte River during the spring migration. they are also hunted in several states in the U.S. currently.</p>	<p>disturbance within this area as needed to conserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife populations.</p>
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