

Whooping Crane

Operational Contingency Plan

Campbell County Wind Farm 2, LLC 2023

Revision 1.0: March 21st 2023



Whooping Crane History and Behavior

The whooping crane was federally listed as endangered in the US in 1967 (32 FR 4001 [March 11, 1967]) and is considered a species of greatest conservation need in South Dakota (South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks [SDGFP] 2022). There are currently four non-captive whooping crane populations, but only the Aransas/Wood Buffalo whooping crane population (AWBP) is naturally occurring, self-sustaining, and protected under the ESA (Urbanek and Lewis 2020). The AWBP was estimated at 543 individuals in the most recent (2021–2022) available winter census data (Butler et al. 2022) and the population has remained fairly stable since 2017 (Harrell and Bidwell 2020).

The AWBP breeds in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and winters along the Texas coast, including in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR; Urbanek and Lewis 2020). The breeding grounds are characterized by numerous potholes (Canadian Wildlife Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 2007) that form shallow wetlands of various shapes and sizes (Urbanek and Lewis 2020). Wintering grounds at Aransas NWR and adjacent areas of the central Texas coast consist of estuarine marshes, shallow bays, tidal flats (Urbanek and Lewis 2020) and occasionally rangelands or farmlands.

Spring migration ranges between March 25 and mid-May and fall migration ranges between mid-September and mid-November (USFWS 2007). Whooping cranes are daytime migrants and are known to travel individually, in family groups, or in small flocks (up to five individuals), however, larger flocks (six or more individuals) have been observed more frequently in recent decades (Caven et al. 2020). Whooping cranes occasionally join flocks of sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) for part of their migration (Urbanek and Lewis 2020). Ninety-five percent of whooping crane sightings occur within a 183-mi wide corridor (Pearse et al. 2018) and the Project occurs within the 95% whooping crane migration corridor (Figure 1.1). Migration flights generally occur between 1,000 and 6,000 feet (ft) above the ground, but whooping cranes fly at lower altitudes when starting or ending a migratory flight, especially when thermal currents are minimal or when making brief mid-day stopovers to forage (USFWS 2009).

Whooping cranes are known to choose stopover sites during migration that sandhill cranes are already utilizing (USFWS 2009). On average, migrating whooping cranes make 11 to 12 overnight stopovers and four multi-day stopovers during each migration season (Pearse et al. 2020). Individuals do not appear to exhibit site fidelity to overnight stopover sites (Pearse et al. 2020), but some areas on the landscape have a higher intensity of stopover use than others (Pearse et al. 2015). Stopover sites provide roosting and foraging areas, typically within 0.6 mi of each other (Urbanek and Lewis 2020) and can include palustrine or lacustrine wetlands, prairie and wet meadows, rivers, and agricultural fields (USFWS 2007).

Project Description

Campbell County Wind Farm 2(CCWF2) is a 98 megawatt (MW) wind generation project located in northcentral South Dakota along SD Highway 1804 south of Pollock. The project owned and

operated by RWE consists of 55 GE 1.7-103 wind turbines across nearly 8000 acres of land. The project area consists predominantly of agricultural row-crops with some grassland areas.

Training for CCWF O&M and OEM Employees

To ensure that all CCWF2 employees, construction, operations and maintenance personnel, and Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) employees can readily identify whooping cranes and be prepared to implement contingencies, all site employees will receive two annual trainings on this contingency plan prior to the start of each migration season. In addition to the Whooping Crane contingency plan training, additional training will be conducted on an annual basis for the site's Wildlife Incident Reporting procedure. A poster of whooping crane identification will be displayed year-round in a common area of the main office building (e.g., kitchen or bulletin) to aid in the education and identification of the species. Plan training will be documented and kept on file at the O&M building. Training will be also provided to new CCWF2 and OEM employees during their initial EH&S orientation program. The following are the minimum topics to be covered during the initial and annual training:

- Regulatory context, natural history, and behavior of the whooping crane.
- Identification of whooping crane adults and juveniles (e.g., photographs) and differentiating among similar species (i.e., sandhill crane [*Grus canadensis*], American white pelican [*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*], great egret [*Ardea alba*], swan [*Cygnus* spp.], and snow goose [*Anser caerulescens*]).
- Avoiding harassing whooping cranes on the ground.
- Reporting and response procedures if a whooping crane is sighted.

Operational Responses to Observation of Whooping Cranes

All personnel and employees who observe whooping cranes in flight or on the ground of the project site shall immediately notify via cell phone or radio the O&M Manager or designee. Information to be provided includes, but is not limited to, number of cranes, location of cranes (include turbine location and proximity), height of travel if in flight, or if the individual(s) are on the ground. The O&M Manager or designee shall then take the necessary steps outlined in the flow charts attached in Appendix A and Appendix B to this plan.

If the “shutdown” of a turbine is warranted per this Operational Contingency Plan, it is important to note that, once initiated, a controlled “shutdown” can take up to ten minutes to complete.

In order to mitigate the risk of a possible collision during **inclement weather periods** where visibility could be poor additional actions by CCWF2 will include:

- Making daily inspections of wetlands within the project area to determine if any whooping cranes are present;

- Driving around the site several times a day to search for any whooping cranes; and
- Recording all observations in a log book as permanent record.
- If a crane is observed on the ground CCWF will follow the process outlined in Appendix B.

In addition to the Operational Contingency Plan, the site shall also follow the Wildlife Incident Reporting Procedure for all wildlife found injured or fatally injured, which is provided in the CCWF2 Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy document.

If at any point a whooping crane collides with a turbine, power line, or any other infrastructure that results in injury or fatality, CCWF2 personnel will **not** capture the bird or touch the carcass. CCWF2 personnel will then contact the USFWS and SDGFP immediately. Photographs and accurate records of the take will be recorded and provided to authorities as required. CCWF2 personnel will not touch or disturb the injured or dead bird.

Operational Contingency Plan Review

This plan shall be reviewed and updated at least every five years. However, if a condition occurs that warrants a more frequent update, it may be incorporated on an as needed basis. Any updates to the plan shall be made in cooperation with SDGFP and USFWS.

Appendix A

Operational Response to Whooping Crane Observation in Flight

Person who identifies whooping crane (WHCR) in flight **immediately** contacts O&M Manager or designee by cell phone or radio. Provides location, number of WHCRs observed, and approximate altitude (above or below rotor sweep)



If WHCR(s), are observed within 2 miles of the project site, site team to begin controlled shutdown of turbines. If WHCR lands within or near project boundaries follow procedure in Appendix B.



O&M Manager or designee shall complete Whooping Crane Notification form and make verbal notifications to SDGFP and USFWS. Additional notifications to WAPA to be followed per notification procedures



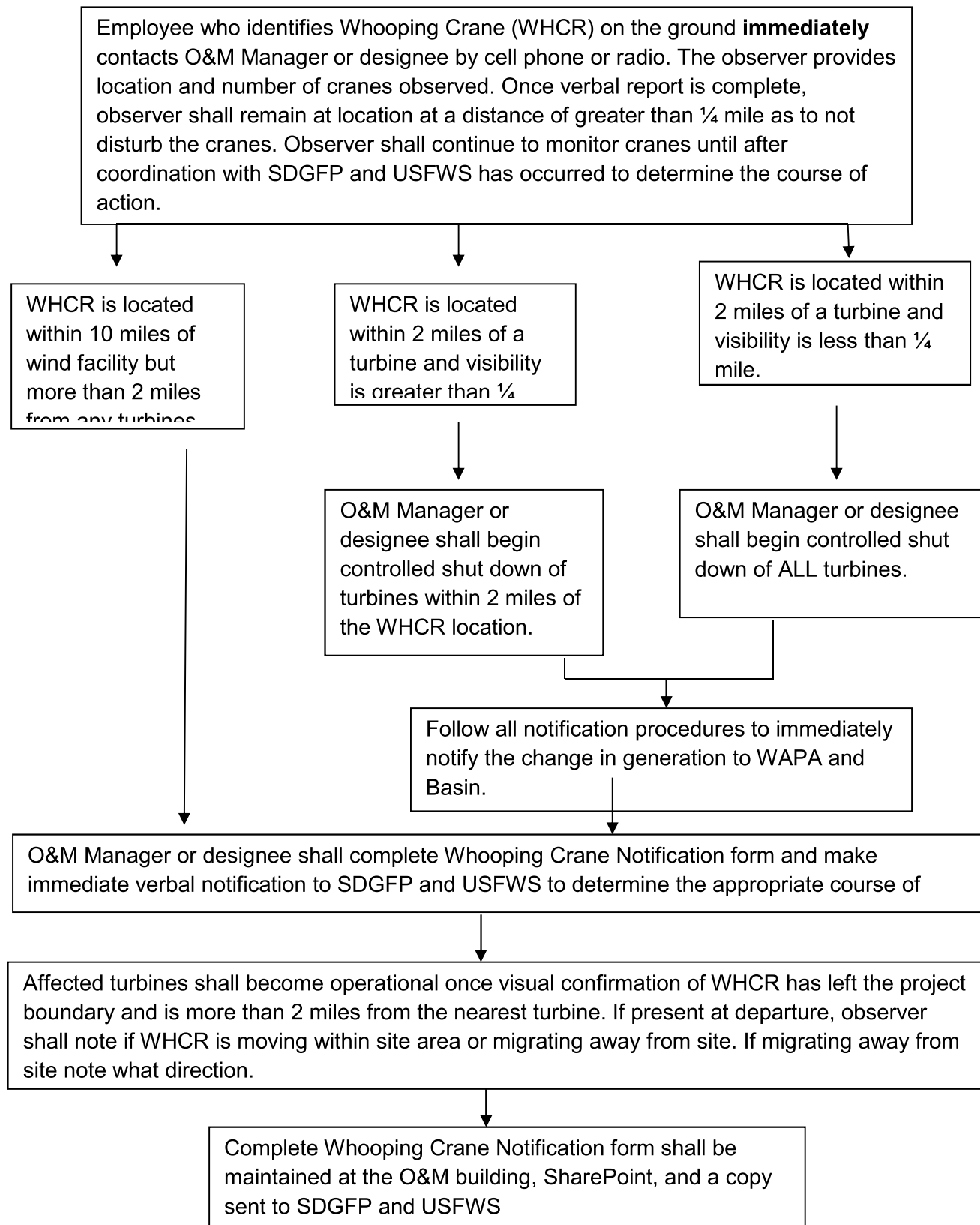
Affected turbines shall become operational once visual confirmation of the WHCR has the left the project boundary for at least 15 minutes and are more than 2 mile from turbines.



Complete Whooping Crane Notification form shall be maintained at the O&M building, SharePoint, and a copy sent to SDGFP and USFWS.

Appendix B

Operational Response to Whooping Crane Observation on Ground



Form A

Whooping Crane Notification Form

Whooping crane observation date and time:

Observer name(s) and
company: _____

Whooping crane(s) flying or on the ground: Flying () or Ground ()

Location of observation (turbine numbers, distance and direction of turbine):

Number of whooping crane(s) identified:

Current weather conditions:

Visibility: _____

Sky cover: _____

Wind: _____

Whooping crane monitoring plan:

Were turbines shut down: Yes () or No ()

Turbines affected by shut down:

Shut down start time:

Shut down end time and date:

Were outside agencies contacted: Yes () or No () if yes list names, dates and times:

Form completed by: _____ Date:

Maintain a copy at the O&M Building

Contact Information

RWE

John Douglas	Business	(605) 277-1305
CCWF O&M Manager	Mobile	(605) 850-9428

Carl Gjeffe	Mobile	(605) 850-9431
CCWF Senior Site Operator		

Jesse Dienert	Mobile	(605) 850- 1214
CCWF Site Operator		

John Oldi	Mobile	(914) 260-4964
Manager of Environmental Programs		

Tyler Juhl		
Midwest Regional Manager	Mobile	(507) 215 1283

USFWS

Natalie Gates	Business	(605) 224-8693
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		ext. 227
<i>natalie_gates@fws.gov</i>		

SD GFP

Hilary Morey	Business	(605) 773-6208
South Dakota Game Fish and Parks		
<i>Hilary.Morey@state.sd.us</i>		