



State of Wisconsin
2025 - 2026 LEGISLATURE

LRB-0591/P4

ZDW:skw

PRELIMINARY DRAFT - NOT READY FOR INTRODUCTION

1 **AN ACT** *to amend* 20.370 (5) (fq), 29.179 (4), 29.563 (13) (a), 29.563 (13) (b),
2 29.563 (14) (c) 3., 29.563 (14) (c) 4., 29.889 (1) (e), 29.938 (intro.), 29.977 (1) (b)
3 and 29.983 (1) (b) 2.; **to create** 20.370 (1) (hy), 29.165, 29.179 (1) (a) 12., 29.180
4 (1) (a) 8m., 29.183 (1) (hm), 29.553 (1) (gm), 29.563 (2) (c) 3., 29.563 (2) (d) 3.,
5 29.563 (13) (am), 29.563 (14) (a) 4. and 29.596 of the statutes; **relating to:**
6 hunting of sandhill cranes, wildlife damage abatement assistance and claim
7 payments for damage caused by sandhill cranes, and making an
8 appropriation.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill is explained in the NOTES provided by the Joint Legislative Council in the bill.

For further information see the state and local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

BILL***The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:***

JOINT LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PREFATORY NOTE: This bill was prepared for the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Sandhill Cranes to authorize the hunting of sandhill cranes and to increase hunting surcharges that support payments to agricultural producers for crop damage caused by wild animals.

Sandhill crane hunting

Like many other migratory birds, sandhill cranes are protected by international treaty and federal law. Consistent with those protections, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) may authorize a state to initiate a sandhill crane hunting season.

The bill directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), upon approval by USFWS, to authorize sandhill crane hunting in Wisconsin. The bill requires that DNR use permits to control the number of hunters and the number of cranes that may be harvested. The bill authorizes DNR to establish closed zones or other restrictions to minimize the inadvertent taking of other bird species, including whooping cranes.

Testimony before the committee indicated that only some sandhill cranes are members of breeding pairs, and that harvest of a breeding crane has a greater impact on overall species population than harvest of a nonbreeding crane. The bill directs DNR to establish restrictions to minimize the likelihood that breeding sandhill cranes are disproportionately hunted.

The bill requires that DNR conduct a free sandhill crane hunter education program. A person must complete the program, or an equivalent program offered by another jurisdiction, and pass a test before hunting sandhill cranes. The program must include specified information about sandhill cranes, such as how to distinguish them from other birds, and specified information about applicable hunting zones and regulations. The results of the test are valid for one year.

If demand for sandhill crane hunting permits exceeds supply, the bill requires DNR to issue permits according to a cumulative preference system. For any given season, a person may apply for either a permit or for a preference point. A person who applies unsuccessfully for a permit is awarded instead a preference point. A person may accumulate and transfer preference points to certain other persons in the same manner as the cumulative preference systems used for other species.

The bill sets the cost of a sandhill crane hunting permit at \$20 for a resident and \$100 for a nonresident. The bill also requires a processing fee of \$4.25 and an issuing fee of \$0.25 for each application for a permit or for a preference point.

The bill deposits with DNR the revenue raised by the sale of a permit and by the processing fee, to be used by DNR as follows: half for the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program (WDACP), described below, and half for developing, managing, preserving, restoring, and maintaining the sandhill crane population and for the sandhill crane hunter education program.

Crop damage caused by wild animals

WDACP provides financial assistance for wildlife damage abatement measures and makes payments to agricultural producers for claims regarding damage to agricultural crops by certain wildlife. The program is funded in large measure by a wildlife damage surcharge on most hunting approvals. Under current law, the surcharge is \$2 for a resident or nonresident approval, and \$4 for a resident or nonresident conservation patron license. A conservation patron license consists of a bundle of individual approvals and authorizations, such as a small game hunting license, a trapping license, and an annual fishing license.

Under current law, damage caused by a sandhill crane becomes eligible under WDACP if hunting of those cranes is authorized by DNR.

The bill raises the wildlife damage surcharge to the following amounts: \$3 for a resident approval; \$4 for a nonresident approval; \$6 for a resident conservation patron

BILL**SECTION 1**

license; and \$8 for a nonresident conservation patron license. However, the bill renders these increases contingent on USFWS approving a sandhill crane hunting season in Wisconsin.

1 **SECTION 1.** 20.370 (1) (hy) of the statutes is created to read:

2 20.370 (1) (hy) *Sandhill crane management.* Fifty percent of all moneys
3 received from the sale of sandhill crane hunting permits under s. 29.165 and the
4 associated processing fee collected under s. 29.563 (14) (a) 4. for developing,
5 managing, preserving, restoring, and maintaining the sandhill crane population
6 and for the sandhill crane hunter education program under s. 29.596.

7 **SECTION 2.** 20.370 (5) (fq) of the statutes is amended to read:

8 20.370 (5) (fq) *Wildlife damage claims and abatement.* All moneys received
9 under ss. 29.181, 29.559 (1r), and 29.563 (13) and not appropriated under par. (fr)
10 and subs. (1) (hs), (hx), and (Ls) and (5) (fs) and 50 percent of all moneys received
11 from the sale of sandhill crane hunting permits under s. 29.165 and the associated
12 processing fee collected under s. 29.563 (14) (a) 4. to provide state aid for the wildlife
13 damage abatement program under s. 29.889 (5) (c) and the wildlife damage claim
14 program under s. 29.889 (7) (d), for county administration costs under s. 29.889 (2)
15 (d), and for payments under s. 29.89.

16 **SECTION 3.** 29.165 of the statutes is created to read:

17 **29.165 Sandhill crane hunting permits.** (1) AUTHORIZATION;
18 RESTRICTIONS. (a) *Department authority.* The department shall authorize the
19 hunting of sandhill cranes in this state, subsequent to approval by the U.S. fish and
20 wildlife service, and shall issue sandhill crane hunting permits to limit the number
21 of hunters of sandhill cranes and the number of sandhill cranes harvested in any
22 area of the state. The sandhill crane hunting permit issued by the department

BILL**SECTION 3**

1 shall include any restrictions necessary to comply with federal laws and
2 regulations. The department shall establish by rule one sandhill crane hunting
3 season and may establish by rule closed zones where the hunting of sandhill cranes
4 is prohibited. The department may temporarily close a sandhill crane hunting
5 season during festivals or ecotourism events related to sandhill cranes. The
6 department shall establish restrictions on sandhill crane hunting permits to
7 minimize the inadvertent taking of other bird species, to minimize the likelihood
8 that breeding sandhill cranes are disproportionately hunted, and to minimize any
9 potential impact to whooping cranes.

10 (b) *Requirements.* No person may hunt sandhill cranes unless he or she has a
11 valid small game license, or other license that authorizes the hunting of small
12 game, and a valid sandhill crane hunting permit.

13 (2) ISSUANCE OF PERMITS. (a) *Procedure; preference system.* If the
14 department issues sandhill crane hunting permits under sub. (1) (a), the
15 department shall determine the number of permits it will issue for a given sandhill
16 crane hunting area and for a given sandhill crane hunting season. If the number of
17 applications for sandhill crane hunting permits for a given hunting area or season
18 does not exceed the number of available sandhill crane hunting permits allocated by
19 the department for that hunting area or that season, the department shall issue a
20 sandhill crane hunting permit to each applicant who pays the applicable fee. If the
21 number of applications for sandhill crane hunting permits for a given hunting area
22 or season exceeds the number of available sandhill crane hunting permits allocated
23 by the department for that area or that season, the department shall issue permits

BILL**SECTION 3**

1 according to a cumulative preference system. The department shall establish
2 preference categories under the cumulative preference system for those applicants
3 who applied for but were not issued permits, with higher priority given to those
4 categories with more preference points than those with fewer preference points.
5 Under the system, the department shall allow each applicant to apply for a
6 preference point or for a permit for each sandhill crane hunting season. The
7 department shall give a preference point to each applicant who applies for a
8 preference point and to each applicant who applies for a permit but who is not
9 selected. If the number of applicants within a preference category exceeds the
10 number of permits available in the category, the department shall select at random
11 within the category the applicants to be issued the permits.

12 (b) *Loss of preference points.* Applicants who fail to apply for either a
13 preference point or a permit at least once during any 3 consecutive years shall lose
14 all previously accumulated preference points.

15 (c) *Permit limitation.* No person may apply for or receive more than one
16 sandhill crane hunting permit for one season.

17 (d) *Notification; issuance; payment.* The department shall issue a notice of
18 approval to those applicants selected to receive a sandhill crane hunting permit
19 under par. (a). A person who receives a notice of approval and who pays the
20 applicable fee in the manner required by the department shall be issued a sandhill
21 crane hunting permit.

22 (3) **USE OF MONEYS FROM FEES.** Of the fee amounts collected from the sale of
23 sandhill crane hunting permits, including processing of the permits, 50 percent

BILL**SECTION 3**

1 shall be credited to the appropriation account under s. 20.370 (1) (hy) and 50
2 percent shall be credited to the appropriation account under s. 20.370 (5) (fq).

3 **SECTION 4.** 29.179 (1) (a) 12. of the statutes is created to read:

4 29.179 (1) (a) 12. Sandhill crane hunting permit.

5 **SECTION 5.** 29.179 (4) of the statutes is amended to read:

6 29.179 (4) RETENTION OF PREFERENCE POINTS. Notwithstanding ss. 29.164 (3)
7 (cr), 29.165 (2) (b), 29.177 (5) (b), 29.184 (6) (b), and 29.192 (4), a person who is
8 transferred an approval under this section shall retain all preference points that he
9 or she has previously accumulated for that type of approval.

10 **SECTION 6.** 29.180 (1) (a) 8m. of the statutes is created to read:

11 29.180 (1) (a) 8m. Sandhill crane hunting permit.

12 **SECTION 7.** 29.183 (1) (hm) of the statutes is created to read:

13 29.183 (1) (hm) Sandhill crane hunting permit.

14 **SECTION 8.** 29.553 (1) (gm) of the statutes is created to read:

15 29.553 (1) (gm) Sandhill crane hunting permit.

16 **SECTION 9.** 29.563 (2) (c) 3. of the statutes is created to read:

17 29.563 (2) (c) 3. Sandhill crane: \$20.

18 **SECTION 10.** 29.563 (2) (d) 3. of the statutes is created to read:

19 29.563 (2) (d) 3. Sandhill crane: \$100.

20 **SECTION 11.** 29.563 (13) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

21 29.563 (13) (a) *Surcharge generally.* The surcharge for resident approvals
22 listed under subs. (2) (a) 1., 2. and 4. to 9. and ~~(b) 1. to 8. and~~ (4) (a) 1. and 1m. ~~and~~
23 ~~(b) 1. and 1m.~~ is ~~\$2~~ \$3 and shall be added to the fee specified for these approvals
24 under subs. (2) and (4). The surcharge for nonresident approvals listed under subs.

BILL**SECTION 11**

1 (2) (b) 1. to 8. and (4) (b) 1. and 1m. is \$4 and shall be added to the fee specified for
2 these approvals under subs. (2) and (4).

3 **SECTION 12.** 29.563 (13) (am) of the statutes is created to read:

4 29.563 (13) (am) *Surcharge for sandhill crane permit.* The surcharge for a
5 resident sandhill crane hunting permit shall be \$3 and the surcharge for a
6 nonresident sandhill crane hunting permit shall be \$4. This surcharge shall be
7 paid together with the processing fee specified in sub. (14) (a) 4.

8 **SECTION 13.** 29.563 (13) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

9 29.563 (13) (b) *Surcharge for conservation patron license.* The surcharge for
10 resident licenses listed under sub. (4) (a) 2. and 2m. and ~~(b) 2. and 2m.~~ is \$4 \$6 and
11 shall be added to the fee specified for these approvals under sub. (4). ~~The surcharge~~
12 for nonresident licenses listed under sub. (4) (b) 2. and 2m. is \$8 and shall be added
13 to the fee specified for these approvals under sub. (4).

14 **SECTION 14.** 29.563 (14) (a) 4. of the statutes is created to read:

15 29.563 (14) (a) 4. The processing fee for applications for sandhill crane
16 hunting permits: \$4.25.

17 **SECTION 15.** 29.563 (14) (c) 3. of the statutes is amended to read:

18 29.563 (14) (c) 3. Each application for a hunter's choice permit, bonus deer
19 hunting permit, elk hunting license, wild turkey hunting license, Class A bear
20 license, wolf harvesting license, Canada goose hunting permit, sandhill crane
21 hunting permit, sharp-tailed grouse hunting permit, bobcat hunting and trapping
22 permit, otter trapping permit, fisher trapping permit, or sturgeon fishing permit:
23 25 cents.

24 **SECTION 16.** 29.563 (14) (c) 4. of the statutes is amended to read:

BILL**SECTION 16**

1 29.563 (14) (c) 4. Each bonus deer hunting permit issued for which a fee is
2 charged under sub. (2) (c) 1. or 1m. or (d) 1. or 2.: 75 cents.

3 **SECTION 17.** 29.596 of the statutes is created to read:

4 **29.596 Sandhill crane hunter education program.** (1) The department
5 shall establish and conduct a sandhill crane hunter education program. The
6 program shall provide a course of instruction that includes all of the following:

7 (a) History and recovery of the sandhill crane in this state and in the eastern
8 United States.

9 (b) Methods used to distinguish sandhill cranes from other birds.

10 (c) Methods used to estimate the population of sandhill cranes in the state.

11 (d) Areas covered by sandhill crane hunting zones.

12 (e) Any rules promulgated by the department concerning the hunting of
13 sandhill cranes.

14 (2) The department shall offer a test for a person to demonstrate successful
15 completion of the course of instruction and shall issue a certificate of
16 accomplishment for free to a person who completes the course of instruction and
17 passes the test. A certificate of accomplishment issued under this subsection is
18 valid for one year. At least once each year, the department shall offer the test to any
19 person who has previously completed the course of instruction to allow the person
20 to renew their certificate of accomplishment for one year.

21 (3) (a) Except as provided in par. (b), no person may hunt sandhill cranes
22 unless he or she has a current, valid certificate of accomplishment issued under
23 sub. (2).

24 (b) A person who has a certificate, license, or other evidence that is

BILL**SECTION 17**

1 satisfactory to the department indicating that he or she has successfully completed
2 in another state, country, or province a sandhill crane hunter education program
3 recognized by the department may hunt sandhill cranes.

4 (4) If the department maintains a system under which the department stores
5 information in an electronic format as described under s. 23.47 (2), the department
6 shall store information in that system relating to persons who have completed a
7 sandhill crane hunter education program, and any associated tests, that satisfies
8 the requirements of this section.

9 (5) The department may not charge a fee for the course of instruction under
10 sub. (1) or the test under sub. (2).

11 **SECTION 18.** 29.889 (1) (e) of the statutes is amended to read:

12 29.889 (1) (e) Sandhill crane, if hunting of sandhill cranes is authorized by the
13 department subsequent to approval by the U.S. fish and wildlife service.

14 **SECTION 19.** 29.938 (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

15 **29.938 Use by the department of unclaimed, seized, or confiscated**
16 **property.** (intro.) The department may receive, retain, and use for the hunter
17 education programs under ss. 29.591 ~~and~~, 29.595, and 29.596, the trapper
18 education program under s. 29.597, or other educational hunting, fishing, trapping,
19 or conservation activities the department conducts any of the following property:

20 **SECTION 20.** 29.977 (1) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

21 29.977 (1) (b) Any moose, fisher, prairie chicken, or ~~sand hill~~ sandhill crane,
22 \$262.50.

23 **SECTION 21.** 29.983 (1) (b) 2. of the statutes is amended to read:

