

Report From Agency

REPORT TO LEGISLATURE

NR 27, Wis. Adm. Code

Amend NR 27 to Remove the Trumpeter Swan from the Endangered Species List and Osprey from the Threatened Species List

Board Order No. ER-08 -08
Clearinghouse Rule No. 08-083

Basis and Purpose of the Proposed Rule

The Department's recovery programs for Trumpeter Swan and Osprey have been very successful. The statewide populations of these two species have increased to the point where they no longer qualify as Endangered or Threatened Species. This rule proposes to repeal NR 27.03 (2) (b) 2. and (3) (b) 8, to remove Trumpeter swans and Osprey from the Wisconsin lists of endangered and threatened species. Trumpeter Swan and Osprey recovery in Wisconsin was made possible through the generous cooperation of dozens of corporate, environmental, and private partners, as well as state, tribal, and federal participants.

Rule Summary-Trumpeter Swan

The Department wrote a recovery plan for the Trumpeter Swan in 1986 (Matteson *et al.* 1986), establishing a recovery goal of at least 20 breeding and migratory pairs by the year 2000. Implementation of the plan first focused on cross-fostering using Mute Swans already in the wild as foster parents during 1987 and 1988, while Department biologists waited in line behind the State of Minnesota to collect Alaskan Trumpeter Swan eggs. Cross-fostering was not successful largely due to heavy snapping turtle predation of the young cygnets.

From 1989 through 1997, Endangered Resources staff (Randy Jurewicz and Sumner Matteson) collected a total of 385 Trumpeter Swan eggs from wild nests in Alaska. These were transported back to Milwaukee by Terry and Mary Kohler and were hatched out in incubators at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Cygnets were placed in two programs: the decoy-rearing program (cygnets imprinted on a life-sized decoy, then flown at less than a week of age to marsh sites in northern and central Wisconsin where UW-interns in camouflaged float tubes led cygnets to feeding and loafing patches); and in the captive-rearing program (cygnets maintained at a site near Pewaukee owned by General Electric Medical Systems until they reached 2 years of age which were then released at selected wetland sites in northern Wisconsin). A total of 355 swans were released via these two techniques. A third technique of lesser importance was captive parent-rearing, where a few captive pairs of swans produced cygnets that were released as yearlings at selected marsh sites in northern Wisconsin. A total of 32 swans were released via this technique. As a result of this population growth, the Natural Heritage Inventory Program has revised the S rank (population status rank) from S3B (20-100 breeding occurrences) to S4B (apparently secure in WI).

In 2007, 113 breeding pairs occurred in 19 counties (see attached figures).

On October 11, 2007, the Wisconsin Trumpeter Swan Recovery Program was awarded a 2007 *Leopold Restoration Award: the John Nolen Award for Excellence in Ecological Restoration Practices*. The dedicated work of several wildlife managers and technicians, Endangered Resources and Science Services staff, the Milwaukee County Zoo, and the UW-Department of Wildlife Ecology helped make this possible, along with the support of the Natural Resources

Foundation, Inc. and several other organizations, businesses, and private individuals. Most of these individuals and organizations/businesses were able to attend a party in their honor held at the Milwaukee County Zoo on 31 March 2007. Certificates of Appreciation for Exceptional Performance were awarded by WDNR Secretary Scott Hassett.

Rule Summary - Osprey

Osprey were one of the raptor species whose populations were decimated by DDT. In the early 1970s the state's nesting population numbered fewer than 100 pairs. Osprey were state listed as Endangered in 1972. In 1986, a comprehensive osprey Recovery Plan was developed by the Department. The goal was to maintain a self-sustaining osprey population in suitable habitat throughout Wisconsin. Two objectives were identified to meet that goal:

1. Maintain statewide production at a minimum of 1.2 young per active nest
2. Increase the number of known active nests to 300.

Four major activity categories were identified:

1. Determine current population and habitat status
2. Determine population and habitat needed to achieve recovery.
3. Protect, enhance, and increase osprey population and habitats.
4. Establish and maintain communication with all interested groups and conduct public education.

Staff from Wildlife Management and Endangered Resources has been conducting yearly statewide surveys of osprey population and reproduction by fixed-wing aircraft. Results are presented in the bar graph and map below (Eckstein).

Ospreys choose dead tree "snags" to build their nests on. Because these snags are no longer present in sufficient numbers in Wisconsin to support the birds, an ambitious DNR project was begun in 1972 to provide artificial nesting platforms. Active nest numbers have been at or above 300 since 1989. They held at a plateau of just under 400 pairs from 1993 to 2002 and have been above 400 pairs since 2003.

As a result of this population growth, the Natural Heritage Inventory Program has revised the S rank (population status rank) from S3 to S4B (apparently secure in WI).

In 1989 the nesting population reached 300 pairs and the species was down listed to Threatened.

As of 2007 survey data, the first objective (productivity) has been closely approached with an average production of 1.18 young per active nest for the last 7 years.

Of continuing concern is the fact that natural nesting habitat for ospreys remains a scarce resource in the state. At least 84% of the nests are on man-made structures, most of them the artificial platforms. These platforms require periodic maintenance, repair, and replacement. Wisconsin's large Osprey population now need more nesting sites than are available naturally and are using on cell phone towers, ball field lights, power poles, and other human structures. It is necessary to continue monitoring, platform maintenance and relationships with energy companies to ensure that osprey continues to thrive in Wisconsin.

Summary of Public Comments

A hearing was held on October 20, 2008, in Madison, to solicit comments on the proposed delisting of these species. Four citizens attended the hearing. Two of the four testified in support of the proposal, one indicated keeping the Trumpeter Swan on the list but did not say why, and one did not indicate a preference. One of the supporters of delisting, however, agreed with a major point of the public presentation: It is necessary to continue monitoring and

maintaining Osprey nesting platforms on power lines, and maintaining relationships with energy companies to ensure that Osprey continues to thrive in Wisconsin.

Of eight emails received by the close of written public comments on October 29, 2008, four congratulated the Department on a job well done, two were against delisting, one strongly advocated that all swans need protection, and a fourth expressed concerns about mercury and lead poisoning and suggested that more financial resources be provided to "assure the health and success of all species that surround us." Of the two emails received against delisting, one gave no reason, but both advocated for Trumpeter Swans to remain on the list. The second email listed the following reasons: "1) Global Warming will endanger all animals and birds. One out of four will become extinct from climate changes. 2) Loss of habitat – builders have encroached on their nesting sites. 3) Turtles and other predators take many of the cygnets. 4) Lead from shotguns kills many birds and this will eventually harm the swans as well." Fortunately, none of these factors—while ongoing concerns—have prevented the steady population growth in the Trumpeter Swan breeding population over the past decade. If climate change and factors such as disease or lead poisoning prove to be limiting factors and contribute to a population decline, the Department can relist the Trumpeter Swan.

In summary, six citizens (50%) were in support of delisting, three (25%) were against delisting, one strongly stated that all swans need protection, one did not indicate a preference, and one expressed concerns about mercury and lead poisoning and felt the solution was to provide more financial resources to endangered resources management.

Modifications Made

None.

Appearances at the Public Hearing

Public Appearances on Proposed Department Rule to Delist the Trumpeter Swan and Osprey, October 20, 2008, GEF 2, Room G09.

1. **Karen Etter Hale**, representing Madison Audubon Society, 222 South Hamilton St., Madison, WI 53707. Testified in support of the proposed rule and made a statement that the program was a great success story, that both species are still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and that it's important to keep monitoring the birds, particularly the Osprey, which will remain dependent on the management of artificial nesting platforms.
2. **Kimberly A. Roper**, representing Save Our Swans. She gave her address as: 12428 250th Ave, Trevor, WI 53179. Testified in support of the proposed rule, but wanted to know how the proposed rule affects Mute Swans, and made a statement that Trumpeter Swans would not appear in her area of southeastern Wisconsin without the reintroduction program so why not allow Mute Swans to coexist there. She also stated that it only takes 1-2 lead pellets to kill a Trumpeter Swan and that Mute Swans feed differently.
3. **Julie Braakman**, representing Save Our Swans. She gave her address as: 24917 125 Street, Trevor, WI 53179. She did not testify. On her hearing appearance slip she wrote: "Keep trumpeters on Protected List; put Swans (Mutes) on!!"
4. **Pete Braakman**, representing self as "student." He gave his address as: 24917 125th Street, Trevor, WI, 53179. He did not testify. On his appearance slip he wrote: "Go Trumpeters & Mutes!"

Changes to Rule Analysis and Fiscal Estimate

None.

Response to Legislative Council Rules Clearinghouse Report

All Clearinghouse comments have been accepted and the rule has been revised accordingly.

Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

The proposed revision to ch. NR 27, Wis. Adm. Code, pertains to rules that list plant and animal species that are Endangered and Threatened in Wisconsin. These rules are applicable to the general public but impose no compliance or reporting requirements for small businesses nor are any design or operation standards contained in the rule. Therefore, under s.227.19(3m), Stats., a final regulatory flexibility analysis is not required.