



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Media Contact:** Heather Ray, 920-573-0905, [heather@operationmigration.org](mailto:heather@operationmigration.org)

### **Operation Migration to end 25-year mission to help save Whooping cranes**

*Champion for cranes that helped grow population is dissolving end of year*

PRINCETON, Wisc. – After years of successfully guiding young Whooping cranes on their first southward migration, internationally renowned Operation Migration, has announced it is permanently closing at the end of 2018.

The aircraft-guided migration trips and the public attention and support Operation Migration generated globally helped restore Whooping cranes to the former range in eastern North America. The cranes remain endangered and are a federally protected species.

Operation Migration originated 25 years ago when two artists-turned-aviators developed a method of teaching migratory birds to follow an aircraft along a pre-selected migratory path.

Innovators Bill Lishman and Joe Duff developed the aircraft-guided migration method into an effective means of reintroducing endangered Whooping cranes into an area they had not inhabited in over a century. The approach helped establish a new population of the cranes, separate and distinct from the only remaining natural flock in Western North America.

In 2001, the first migration flight leading Whooping cranes provided an uplifting story for the nation that was struggling with the aftermath of the 9-11 attack. For 15 years, Operation Migration pilots and ground crew led Whooping cranes on a journey toward survival, and in that time covered 17,457 miles with a total of 186 Whooping cranes following.

The aircraft-guided migrations ended in Fall of 2015 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided the method was “too artificial.” Since the flights were discontinued, Operation Migration has conducted crane research including costume rearing, releasing parent-reared cranes and helping to track and monitor the eastern flock.

“This difficult decision to dissolve the organization is heartbreaking for us all, but we have exhausted all possible avenues to avoid this outcome,” said Duff, who is Operation Migration’s CEO and cofounder. “We continued our work based upon our belief that the goal of a self-sustaining Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping cranes was attainable; however, with new management directives authorized by the Whooping Crane Recovery Team and implemented by Region 3 Fish and Wildlife Service, we no longer believe this goal is achievable.

“As a result, we cannot continue, in good faith, to accept contributions or assign our staff and volunteers to carry out the work outlined in the strategic plan imposed on the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP).”

Supporters from around the world have generously contributed to Operation Migration's aircraft-guided project, its successful costume-rearing program, and education and research programs, all of which have contributed to Whooping crane conservation.

Among its many accomplishments, Operation Migration:

- Made hundreds of thousands of people more aware of the plight of Whooping cranes and the value of wetlands thanks to Operation Migration's reports on their blog for the past 18 years;
- Partnered with Journey North, a distance learning program, to bring information about Whooping cranes to millions of school-aged children worldwide;
- Hosted the first LIVE streaming camera featuring wild Whooping cranes
- Raised awareness of the Whooping crane plight and gained global attention for the efforts to save them through the aircraft-guided program. Their work was featured in numerous news stories and documentaries, and published in many books and magazines that inspired people to care about, and take action for, these vulnerable cranes;
- Helped reintroduced Whooping cranes that learned to avoid humans, select proper habitat, pair with other Whooping cranes and are producing offspring;

Both President Jimmy Carter and noted conservationist Jane Goodall supported Operation Migration, which also earned significant awards, such as:

- 2002 National Wildlife Federation "Conservation Achievement Award";
- 2004 Canada Post "Canadian Environmental Award";
- 2004 The Whooping Crane Conservation Association "Honor Award";
- 2006 American Birding Association, Partners in Flight "Outstanding Contribution to Bird Conservation";
- 2009 U.S. Dept. of the Interior "Partners in Conservation Award".

Aircraft used in Operation Migration's flights are on display at three distinguished locations: Disney's Animal Kingdom; The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum; and the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Museum. They are a reminder that people can take innovative action to help species in trouble.

Operation Migration staff and Board members extend a heartfelt thank you to all Operation Migration members, supporters, volunteers and staff (past and present). Although the organization's long-term goal was not achieved, Operation Migration feels confident that there would not be Whooping cranes migrating east of the Mississippi River without the generous contributions of its members and supporters.

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