Legislative study committee proposes a solution for sometimes-troublesome cranes

By WisPolitics

Sandhill cranes are a wildlife success story.
More than a century ago, they were nearly hunted to extinction.
Now they number some 50,000 in Wisconsin.
But all those beautiful birds can damage crops. And that is behind the frequent efforts to allow for hunting of the cranes.
So, it should be no surprise that a split study committee of the Wisconsin Legislature has voted 8-4 to recommend legislation that would allow a hunt of sandhill cranes while providing state funding to address damage the birds do to crops.

The committee had three bill drafts on its agenda in mid-December: one that only addressed the crop subsidies, one focused on the hunt and one that combined the two.

The committee voted 7-5 to reject the standalone crop subsidy bill. It then passed on taking up the bill that only addressed a possible hunt.

Under the bill draft, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection would administer a program to reimburse producers up to 50% of the costs to obtain a non-lethal treatment that they apply to corn seed to discourage birds from consuming it. The reimbursement would be capped at $6,250 per applicant, per planting season.

The bill would appropriate nearly $1.9 million in general purpose revenue in each 2025-26 and 2026-27.

State Sen. Romaine Quinn, R-Cameron, told the committee it would be a “tough pill to swallow” for some members of his caucus to just do the crop subsidy program because of the price tag or to only push a hunt.

“By marrying the two issues together, whether or not we think they’re related, I think helps legislators get to a spot where they are comfortable because I think everyone wants to help farmers,” Quinn said. “I think everyone wants to help satisfy their other constituencies.”

The committee’s action recommends the Joint Legislative Council to introduce the bill in the 2025-26 legislative session.

News reports show some birds are killed each year in Wisconsin. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issues about permits in Wisconsin annually to kill some 1,000 sandhill cranes that create problems for farms. And Native American tribes also harvest several hundred
sandhill cranes each year across their territory.

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