



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**New Conservation Partnership Launches in Louisiana with the
Release of 12 Endangered Whooping Cranes into the Wild**

*Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Audubon Nature Institute and Chevron Partner to
Save Whooping Cranes from Extinction*

(Grand Chenier, La.) – A group of 12 juvenile whooping cranes were released into the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' (LDWF) Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge today in Grand Chenier as part of an ongoing effort to protect the species from extinction. The juvenile cranes join 49 other whooping cranes that are a part of an experimental population being monitored by LDWF.

Supported by generous donors like Chevron, LDWF and Audubon Nature Institute have been longtime leaders in whooping crane conservation and recently expanded their partnership with the goal of developing a self-sustaining population of whooping cranes in Louisiana. This partnership is an example of state agencies, non-profit organizations and private industry collaborating to leverage their strengths to achieve measurable conservation results and make a significant, historic impact on the future of this endangered species.

Of the 12 cranes, seven were reared at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, two were raised at Calgary Zoo in Canada and three were hatched from eggs collected from the wild in Wisconsin and reared at the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans. All 12 cranes were brought to the Species Survival Center where they formed a "cohort," the scientific term for a small group of cranes assembled to live and migrate together.

"The goal of a cohort is to socialize the animals together so they will thrive as a group in the wild. The young chicks are released without parents so the cohort will create a family for the birds to increase their chances of survival," said Richard Dunn, Assistant Curator at the Species Survival Center.

These 12 cranes joined 11 juvenile whooping cranes from the International Crane Foundation which were released on November 9 on the nearby White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA). The addition of these 23 cranes increases the flock to 72 whooping cranes living in the wild in Louisiana. Support of partners including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, International Crane Foundation, and Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation have allowed LDWF and Audubon to expand their efforts in Louisiana.

Since 2011, Chevron has invested in LDWF's Whooping Crane Reintroduction Project. In addition to continuing its contributions to LDWF, the company also awarded Audubon a grant to help fund improvements to the Species Survival Center's whooping crane breeding pens. Chevron not only contributed financially to the initiative; their employees have also given volunteer hours to help construct the enhanced whooping crane enclosures.

"At Chevron, we recognize the importance of protecting ecological diversity – the rich variety of wildlife on Earth, its ecosystems and species, and the ecological processes that support them," said Leah Brown, Public Affairs Manager for Chevron's Gulf of Mexico Business Unit. "We're proud to continue our long-standing collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Audubon Nature Institute on whooping crane restoration and repopulation. Through awareness programs, educational efforts and volunteerism, we're working to make ensure this endangered species is thriving for generations to come."

The Louisiana flock was developed in 2011 when 10 whooping cranes from the U. S. Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Facility in Maryland were released to WLWCA in Vermilion Parish to develop the non-migratory flock. This marked a significant conservation milestone with the first wild whooping cranes in Louisiana since 1950. In 2016, the first chick hatched in the wild in Louisiana since 1939—a significant sign of recovery for the species.

"We continue on the path to establishing a self-sustained whooping crane population in Louisiana so this magnificent bird can thrive for generations to come," LDWF Secretary Jack Montoucet said. "We've made so many advances in our whooping crane program, including the first wild-hatched whooping crane in Louisiana in 2016. The arrival of this cohort is another important step in the restoration process. We are blessed to have many partners, including private landowners who have assisted us by working with our staff when the cranes roost on their property. We thank them for their help."

In early 2017, Audubon was asked to significantly increase the number of crane chicks raised at the rearing facility to supplement the migratory populations and the non-migratory whooping crane population in Louisiana. As one of only three whooping crane breeding facilities in the US, support of project partners is vital to the long-term success of the whooping crane population in Louisiana.

"The whooping crane is one of the species included in Association of Zoos and Aquariums' (AZA) Saving Animals from Extinction (SAFE) program, which focuses the collective expertise within accredited zoos and aquariums and leverages their massive audiences to save species," said Kyle Burks, Vice President & Managing of Audubon Zoo. "With continued support, we can leverage the expansion of the crane breeding program into long-term growth of the population and share what we learn with other whooping crane programs."

Anyone encountering a whooping crane is advised to observe the bird from a distance and to report the sighting to LDWF (<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/webform/whooping-crane-reporting-form>). Whooping cranes are large-bodied, white birds with a red head and black facial markings along. Birds measure a height of five feet and a wingspan of 7 to 8 feet that makes them very distinctive. In flight, whooping cranes display black wing tips, a fully extended neck, and legs which extend well beyond the tail.

Anyone witnessing suspicious activity involving whooping cranes is advised to call the LDWF's Enforcement Division at 1-800-442-2511 or use the tip411 program, which may offer a cash reward for information leading to arrests or convictions. To use the tip411 program, citizens can text LADWF and

their tip to 847411 or download the "LADWF Tips" iPhone app from the Apple iTunes store free of charge. Citizen Observer, the tip411 provider, uses technology that removes all identifying information before LDWF receives the text so that LDWF cannot identify the sender.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is charged with managing and protecting Louisiana's abundant natural resources. For more information, visit us at www.wlf.la.gov. To receive email alerts, signup at <http://www.wlf.la.gov/signup>

Audubon Nature Institute

Audubon Nature Institute operates a family of museums, parks and research facilities dedicated to celebrating the wonders of nature. Through innovative live animal exhibits, education programs, and scientific discovery, Audubon makes a meaningful contribution to preserving wildlife for the future. Audubon Nature Institute flagships include Audubon Park, Audubon Zoo, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, Entergy Giant Screen Theater, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium, Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center, Woldenberg Riverfront Park and Audubon Wilderness Park. Ron Forman is President and CEO of Audubon Nature Institute.