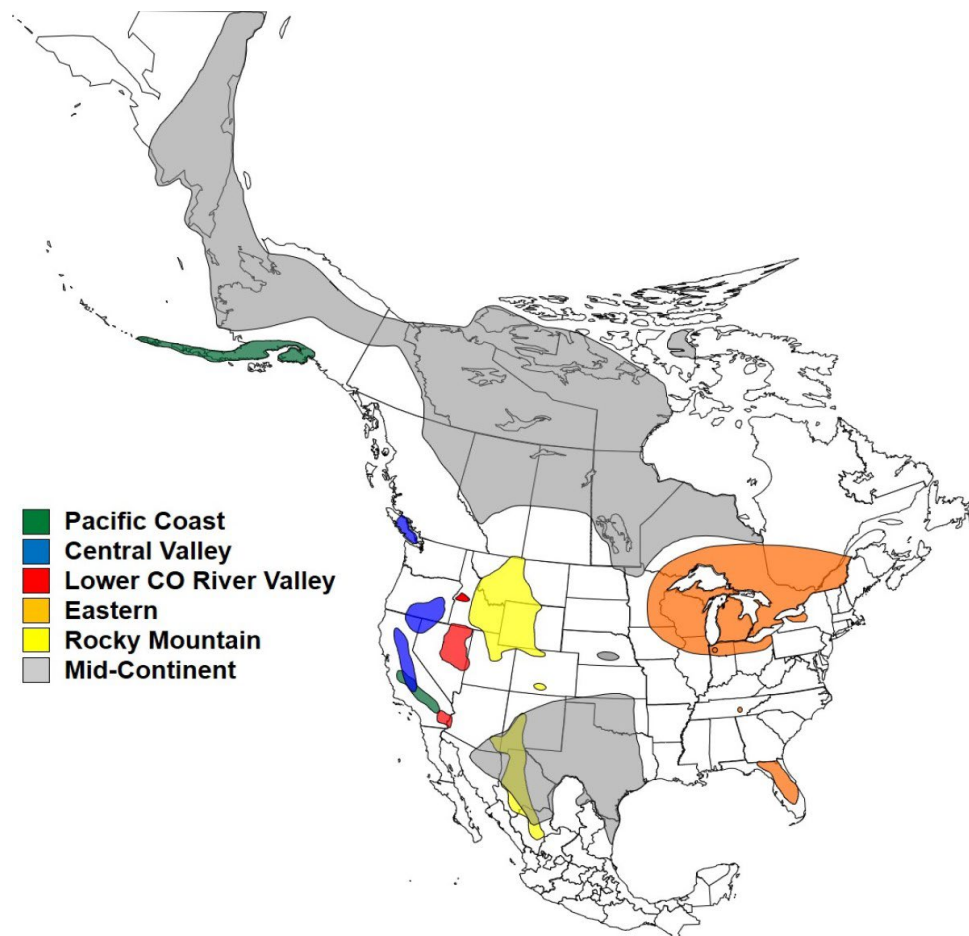


Sandhill Cranes – A Brief History

Migratory game birds, like sandhill cranes, doves, and waterfowl, are managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 4 zones across the USA, called Flyways. Arizona is a member state in the Pacific Flyway (Figure 1) and was the first state in the Flyway to permit sandhill crane hunting in 1981. Arizona hosts birds from both the Rocky Mountain and Midcontinent populations (RMP and MCP respectively) as they migrate here to winter in southeastern Arizona and parts of New Mexico (Figure 2).

The MCP is much larger, numbering in the hundreds of thousands of birds (and currently approaching 1 million birds in recent years) and managed with no upper limit on population numbers, while the RMP is smaller in number and managed for population levels between 17,000-21,000 birds because numbers above this range increase crop damage and human conflicts on their breeding grounds in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Thus, while we get birds from both the RMP and MCP, sandhill crane permit numbers for harvest in Arizona are annually based on RMP numbers on their breeding grounds.

Consequently, when crane numbers are greater than 21,000 birds up north, the USFWS increases the number of permits available to hunters to bring the population back into the objective range. Because Arizona's permit numbers are driven by the number of RMP birds harvested here rather than the total number of cranes harvested, we don't offer open seasons or over-the-counter hunts for cranes like neighboring New Mexico or states with more liberal hunts do.



[Six designated populations of sandhill cranes used in managing sandhill cranes in the USA. Note the Rocky Mountain (in yellow) and Mid-Continent (in gray) populations that winter in southeastern Arizona.] (*credit: Kammie Kruse, USFWS*)