

Brett 5/10/22  
The Town has not  
received a response from  
the DNR.  
We do not have an  
ordinance or resolution  
at this time.  
Jodie King

July 15, 2020

To: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Ref: Comment on Double Crested Cormorant Management  
From: Town of Liberty Grove, 11161 Old Stage Road, Sister Bay WI 54234

LOOK AT ALL THOSE BIRDS! A comment heard when seeing the unending string of double crested cormorants flying northward through the straits of Death's Door between Wisconsin's tip of Door County and Washington Island—literally by the thousands.

This letter comes to relay comments on the proposed take of the double crested cormorants in the Lake Michigan/Door County area. We have reviewed the "Environmental Assessment Issuing Depredation Permits for the Double Crested Cormorant Management". We appreciate the attention to detail the report entails and laud the efforts of USFWS to effectively manage the cormorant population.

We are especially concerned about the Pilot Island situation off northern Door County just off Washington Island, currently owned by USFWS. Pilot island is currently host to literally thousands of cormorants, which have taken over the island, denuding it of vegetation and infesting it and the surrounding waters with guano. What was once a green, vibrant, pristine island has become a barren piece of rock with two former lighthouse structures protruding from the surface. Our hope is that an increased take of cormorants along with a restoration plan can lead to a return to a more pleasing situation.

The concerns mentioned in the environmental assessment ring true in a big way for Pilot Island. Property damage is probably the most obvious as one observes the island from the mainland shore or on the water. Cormorant guano has destroyed all the vegetation and produces a putrid smell that makes it wholly unattractive to even visit or work on the island. Economic loss is mentioned in the report, linking that to aquaculture; however, the local economic loss is coming from the impact on sport fishing, as the cormorants have decimated the local sport fishing around the island. The fish are gone, and one cannot even sit in a boat near the island without being overcome by the stench emanating from the shore. Tourism is economically vital to the local economy, and sport fishing is a huge component of that equation.

A third concern is disease transmission—the report lists bacterial pathogens with the birds being host to cestodes, nematodes, trematodes and other parasites that can infect fish. The list doesn't stop there. Other diseases shown to be present on Pilot Island are avian cholera ([Wildlife Health Matters](#), Wis. DNR), avian botulism ([USFWS Habitat Management Plan](#)), Newcastle disease ([USFWS Habitat Management Plan](#)), west Nile virus (USDA APHIS, Wis DNR), salmonellosis (NE Wildlife Disease Co-op), aspergillosis, e. coli (DRAFT EIS U.S. Dept. of Interior Fish & Wildlife Service), and suspected airborne histoplasmosis (contracted on island similar to Pilot Island).

Also mentioned is the threat to other species in addition to fish which comes from competition for nesting sites, putting stress on species of birds sharing the island. This aggressiveness can lead to reduced reproductive success for other endangered birds.

Success stories are mentioned: terns and black-crowned night herons in New York's Oneida Lake; Caspian terns nesting for the first time ever at Pelican Island in Minnesota's Leech Lake; co-nesting species in Ohio—all benefiting from cormorant management.

Then we have the inevitable concerns from birdwatchers and anti-hunters. While these concerns are to be taken seriously, we have to ask—can you sacrifice a few birds of one species—cormorants—in order to guarantee the survival of other less aggressive birds for viewing. Letting the cormorant population run wild certainly is not beneficial in the long run for all concerned.

We would hope that USFWS will take these comments to heart when considering an increase in taking of cormorants. The Town of Liberty Grove supports an increase, especially in reference to Pilot Island where an over population of birds has had and is having a marked effect in regard to property damage, human health and safety, and economic loss. A larger take number, coupled with more aggressive methods of taking, whatever that may be, will certainly be welcomed by governing officials and citizens alike.

50 CFR 21.41 authorizes the take of migratory birds that are impacting crops, property, human health and safety, and endangered species. We believe the examples shown in this letter more than justify the increased take so desperately needed to safeguard these issues.

Sincerely,

Walter Kalms, Administrator  
Town of Liberty Grove