



Double-crested Cormorant Management

Quick Facts

- Cormorants have been protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act since 1972 after their populations dropped precipitously as a result of factors such as use of the pesticide DDT.
- Today, cormorant populations are at historic highs in many areas due in large part to the presence of ample food in their summer and winter ranges, federal and state protection, and reduced contaminant levels.
- The total estimated population of double-crested cormorants in North America is approximately 2 million birds.

Management Needs

- Any agency that wants to control double-crested cormorant damage must submit a written justification to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Agencies that conduct cormorant population control locally are required to evaluate the effects of their action on double-crested cormorant populations and annually report their findings to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Current Status

In October 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a Final Rule and Record of Decision allowing more flexibility in the control of double-crested cormorants where they are causing damage to aquaculture and public resources such as fisheries, vegetation or other birds.

The rule expands an aquaculture depredation order that has been in place in 13 states since 1998 to allow the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services division to conduct winter roost control. It also establishes a public resource depredation order to allow state wildlife agencies, tribes and Wildlife Services to conduct cormorant control to protect public resources in 24 states, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. Without these depredation orders, agencies and individuals would not be able to control cormorants without a federal permit.

Through the new rule, the Service may authorize states, tribes and Wildlife Services to manage and control double-crested cormorants to protect public resources (fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats).

Agencies acting under the order must have landowner permission, may not adversely affect other migratory bird species, threatened or endangered species, and must satisfy annual reporting and evaluation requirements. The Service will ensure long-term conservation of cormorant populations with annual assessments of agency reports and regular population monitoring.



Hot Topic

Michigan Initiates Cormorant Management Plan: In May, USDA Wildlife Services and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released the final Environmental Assessment spelling out plans to reduce double-crested cormorant damage in Michigan.

The Service also modified its 1998 aquaculture depredation order to allow control of cormorants at winter roosts near fish farms and to allow fish hatcheries to protect their stock from cormorant predation. This added authority applies to the original 13 states in the 1998 order.

Double-crested cormorants are colonial waterbirds whose numbers have increased substantially in the past 30 years. They have been documented to have caused damage to resources such as commercial aquaculture, recreational fisheries, vegetation and the habitat of other colonial nesting birds.