

## DEVELOPING TRUMPETER SWAN WINTERING AREAS

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### WINTERING FLOCK RESTORATION

The lack of good Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) wintering areas and the extirpation of traditional migration routes to adequate wintering areas are believed to be serious limiting factors for restoration of Trumpeter Swans. A good Trumpeter wintering area should provide open water, aquatic plant food, and protection from disturbances and pollution. Supplemental food may be provided if the other elements are available.

Some experts have written that we have been restoring Trumpeters backwards, that perhaps we should have restored the Trumpeters on adequate southern areas and allowed their descendants to search north for nesting grounds. This appears to be a normal way for Trumpeters to pioneer.

But the first restoration sites were chosen as self-sufficient areas in which to develop endangered species survival flocks. Fjetland (1974) describes this effort on the national wildlife refuge system. Batt (1976) describes a similar effort by the Delta Waterfowl Research Station in Manitoba.

After the Trumpeter was delisted from The Redbook in 1968, there was little interest in Trumpeter restoration by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service or in the south. Interest was maintained in the north, where restoration was continued on a case by case basis.

Several proposals were made to develop wintering flocks in middle Mississippi River states. Dr. Donald Hammer, Senior Biologist with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and staff proposed to develop a breeding-wintering flock on their vast waters. Upon objections that Trumpeters were not known to nest in that area, they revised their proposal to provide breeding stock for approved areas, trained to migrate to and from TVA's wintering waters. Subtle opposition by state and Washington, DC, officials kept the proposal from being implemented.

In 1980, a proposal to restore a Trumpeter Swan breeding/wintering flock at Marais des Cygnes

Management Area in east-central Kansas lost its state approval, as we understood it, due to a tirade against Trumpeter Swans at a Central Flyway meeting by the eastern Montana representative, who raised the spectre of closures to hunting. He cited, as an example, Wyoming's earlier closure of Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*) hunting in the Tristate Region, where Snow Geese were very rare, to protect the then endangered Trumpeter Swan.

This spectre of closure still persists in the minds of some state and flyway officials, in spite of everything we can do to reassure them. Flyway mechanisms exist for resolving such conflicts.

There is so little to lose and so much to gain for a state or an agency in restoring the magnificent Trumpeter Swan. It improves the state's image for it to be concerned with all of its wildlife. It is good to increase the biodiversity and quality of life. It is good to promote wetlands, and you can promote quality wetlands with Trumpeters, as Nebraska and Iowa have done. It is good to promote outdoor recreation and tourism, both from within the state and out-of-state, with something as worthwhile to see as Trumpeter Swans.

The Lacreek Trumpeter Swan Plan (Burgess *et al.* 1982) proposed an experimental transfer of Trumpeter families from Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota to the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge- Duck Creek Wildlife Management Area Wetland Complex in southeast Missouri. The expectations were that the adults would return to Lacreek and that the cygnets would be imprinted on the Mingo swamps as a wintering area. The first shipment of a family of two adults and three cygnets arrived at Mingo in September 1982. The adults made Mingo their new home, but the cygnets disappeared. Between 1982 and 1987, 33 Trumpeters were transferred from the Lacreek High Plains Flock to Mingo.

Much about Trumpeter Swan ecology was learned in this experimental study, as described in Missouri's final report (Smith 1988). Of importance for developing a southern breeding flock was the fact that

a breeding pair had been translocated a considerable distance southeast and still continued to nest.

Since the 1970s, Missouri has been involved in an aggressive wetlands acquisition and development program. Since 1973, the state has wintered at least 145 Trumpeter Swans from as far west as Alberta and as far east as Michigan. Many of these swans have used Missouri's new wetlands. Perhaps it is time to concentrate on the most attractive Trumpeter areas in Missouri and develop permanent wintering areas.

#### **PROPOSAL FOR WINTERING AREA DEVELOPMENT**

In order to develop Trumpeter Swan wintering areas, we would choose an area well below the 40th parallel and below 1000 feet elevation in eastern Kansas, Missouri, southern Illinois, eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas, or Tennessee with open unpolluted waters, ample winter food, and protection from unusual disturbances and high utility lines. We would obtain the support of the local people, the state natural resource agency or conservation department, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Flyway Councils. We would keep our plans simple, general, and very flexible.

We would provide large, attractive holding pens near potential swan wintering areas, putting clipped Trumpeter Swans in these pens as live-call decoys. If it's a breeding pair, that would be great. We might have luck with them nesting in the pen. If breeding

pairs of Trumpeters are not available, we would use singles or injured flightless adults, other swans, or even white domestic geese until breeding Trumpeters were available. Preferably, we would put breeding or 2½-year-old Trumpeter pairs in winter pens in November and keep them flightless until the second year.

We would provide supplemental food, preferably wheat, in a Lacreek-type feeder, high enough above ground to discourage the use by other waterfowl. We would prefer an accessible, staffed site where essential services could be provided as needed.

#### **LITERATURE CITED**

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