Not Just For The Birds: Double-Crested Cormorant Population Management In Minnesota

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Abstract:
Phalacrocorax auritus, the Double Crested Cormorant, is under federal protection by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but its population in the Great Lakes Basin is growing rapidly. This is resulting in increasing negative consequences. Not only are they human endeavors like the poultry industry and fish hatcheries, Double Crested Cormorant are causing negative impacts on native bird and fish populations as well as native vegetation. The question I address in my thesis is how do we best manage the population of these birds both to protect the species from disease and to protect the environment. Options within a population management plan could include lethal management, non-lethal management or a combination of both. I have conducted a literature review on the subject of Double Crested Cormorant population management and have interviewed experts in the field of wildlife management on efforts currently under-way at Leech Lake in Minnesota. I conclude that there is not one particular method to manage double cormorant most effectively. Instead a plan must be carefully researched for each site and be drafted on a case by case basis to ensure maximum efficiency as well as minimizing costs.

Methods:
To better understand the problem that Double-Crested Cormorants can pose, I conducted a literature review which included documents drafted by the United States Department of Agriculture as well as by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. I also conducted a telephone interview with Steve Lewis, Regional Non-game Bird Coordinator for the Midwest Region for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, to better understand why Minnesota had decided to manage Double-Crested Cormorant. I then investigated Minnesota’s management efforts further by speaking to Steve Moffeison, Fish and Wildlife Biologist for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Steve has worked as the Leech Lake Biologist for 29 years and has been integral to the management of Double-Crested Cormorant on Leech Lake by both helping to get it started and by participating in management practices.

Conclusion:
The decision to manage Double-Crested Cormorant should be made on a case-by-case basis. This decision should be based on population size, target populations size, the impact the birds are having on their environment and the colonies reproductive success. The term used by Steve Lewis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is “adaptive management,” which involves the setting of a tentative goal and then adaption of the management practices based on the colonies reaction to management. These adaptive management plans will most often include a combination of lethal and non-lethal management practices. This combination will be based upon which practices will be most effective with the least cost.