



News Release

Southwest Region P.O. Box 1306 Albuquerque, NM 87103

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Contacts: Ben Ikenson, 505-248-6911

Stuart Leon, 505-248-6657

Draft Recovery Plan for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Available for Review

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability for public review of a draft Recovery Plan for the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), a neotropical migratory bird which was listed as an endangered species in 1995. A public comment period will close on October 4, 2001.

The Draft Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Plan describes the status, current management, recovery objectives and criteria, and specific actions needed to reclassify the southwestern willow flycatcher from endangered to threatened, and to ultimately delist it. The draft plan was developed by 13 scientists from various disciplines who were appointed in January 1998 by the Service's Southwest Regional Director Nancy Kaufman.

"The southwestern willow flycatcher is critically endangered and can only be saved by widespread participation and support of all affected stakeholders in its range," said Kaufman. "We have tried to involve all interested parties in the recovery of this bird."

One of four currently-recognized willow flycatcher subspecies, the southwestern willow flycatcher breeds and rears young in southwestern U.S. and migrates to Mexico, Central America, and possibly northern South America during the non-breeding season. The primary reason for the bird's decline is loss of riparian habitat throughout the Southwest.

More than 300 community representatives including ranchers, environmental representatives, water and power interests, state and federal land managers, and local governments were appointed to discuss proposed recovery actions in six geographic areas of the seven U.S. states where the bird is known to breed: Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico.

"Regional meetings were essential to developing a better understanding of specific threats within different watersheds, as well as the various activities already occurring, or that could occur, to ameliorate these threats," said Debbie Finch, Recovery Team Leader who works for the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Actions needed to recover the southwestern willow flycatcher are those that would increase and improve breeding habitat by restoring and enhancing riparian ecosystems including restoring flood cycles in some years; lessening impacts from domestic livestock, wild burros, and native grazers; securing long-term

protection of breeding habitat; managing exotic plant species; and reducing parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds.

Recovery plans are not binding documents. Rather, they prescribe activities leading to the recovery of a threatened or endangered species. Once comments to the draft recovery plan are addressed and the Service finalizes and approves it, it will serve as a blueprint of steps to conserve the flycatcher and a compass for the development of policy on conservation and management of the species.

The draft Plan will be revised and finalized based on comments received during meetings with the six regional groups, as well as comments received from the public. Comments on the draft Recovery Plan must be received on or before October 4, 2001 to receive consideration by the Service. To obtain copies of the Draft Plan, contact Greg Beatty, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Arizona, 85021-4951; or download it from the Internet at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>. Written comments and materials regarding the plan should be addressed to the Field Supervisor at this same address. Comments and materials received will be available on request for public inspection, by appointment during normal business hours at the same address.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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