## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service





## News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

2321 W. Royal Palm Rd, Ste 103

Phoenix, AZ 85021

For Release: July 19, 2002 Contacts:

tacts: Jeff Humphrey (FWS), 602-242-0210 x222

Jeff Lane (SRP), 602-236-2500

## **Endangered Birds Being Considered In Roosevelt Water Storage Decisions**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and Salt River Project (SRP) invite public review, suggestions, and comments to plans designed to offset the effects of Roosevelt Dam operation on populations of threatened and endangered birds. SRP has developed a draft Habitat Conservation Plan for the operation of Roosevelt Dam and water levels in Roosevelt reservoir that may result in the flooding of recently established habitat occupied by breeding southwestern willow flycatchers and three other rare bird species. In turn, SRP will seek a Service permit to "take" endangered flycatchers and Yuma clapper rails, threatened bald eagles and yellow-billed cuckoos (a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection), and their habitat that may occur as a result of the routine operation of Roosevelt Dam and refilling of the reservoir.

Since 1996, lower-than-usual rainfall and snow-melt have resulted in lowered water levels at Lake Roosevelt. Nearly seven years of declining water levels have exposed the nutrient rich sediment deposited where Tonto Creek and the Salt River flow into the reservoir. Dense riparian vegetation, principally non-native salt cedar, has been established on both deltas. The new habitat has resulted in the immigration and expansion of southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo populations during their summer breeding season – all in an area usually submerged under water stored for use in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Bald eagles forage in the area and this spring a Yuma clapper rail (a shore bird) was recorded in the dense shoreline habitat.

Federally threatened and endangered species are protected from "take," including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying their habitat. The Service may however, under limited circumstances, issue permits to take federally listed species when such a taking is incidental to – and not the purpose of – otherwise lawful activities and the taking does not jeopardize the continued survival of the species.

Since 1911, Roosevelt Dam and Reservoir, has provided water for power generation, irrigation, municipal and other uses. Today, SRP manages Roosevelt together with three other reservoirs on the Salt River and two on the Verde River, to supply water to 1.6 million people in the cities of Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler, Tempe, Gilbert, Scottsdale, Tolleson, and Avondale. Irrigation water is provided to agricultural lands in the Valley, and SRP delivers Roosevelt water to the Salt River Pima-Maricopa, Fort McDowell, and Gila River Indian communities; Buckeye Irrigation Company; Roosevelt Irrigation District; Roosevelt Water Conservation District; and others. Additionally, Roosevelt and other SRP reservoirs provide a variety of recreational uses and environmental benefits in central Arizona.

When rain and snow runoff conditions again replenish water-stores required by Valley residents and industries, new delta habitat will be periodically inundated. This refilling of the reservoir will adversely affect the protected birds' habitat and will result in the harassment, harm, and possible death of some birds. SRP has developed the Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan (RHCP) to minimize and mitigate (offset) impacts to the species and their habitat associated with the filling and continued operation of Roosevelt. SRP will submit a finalized RHCP to the Service in anticipation of Service approval of the plan and issuance of a permit for the incidental take of the listed birds on a time line that will allow the reservoir to be filled with this coming winter's runoff.

The Service and SRP have prepared a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the proposed RHCP and its reasonable alternatives.

Ultimately, the draft RHCP seeks to minimize and mitigate the "take" of 750, 5, and 313 acres of flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, and cuckoo habitat (respectively) resulting from filling of Roosevelt Lake and to not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the species' survival in the wild. SRP proposes to achieve this by:

- Acquiring and managing in perpetuity at least 1500 acres of riparian habitat along the Verde, San Pedro, and Gila rivers including establishing 20 or more acres of riparian habitat near Roosevelt (approximately 820 of these acres have already been or will be acquired by Bureau of Reclamation).
- Implementing other conservation measures equivalent to at least 750 acres of riparian habit including:
  1) managing and protecting habitat at or near Roosevelt; 2) dedicating water rights that will benefit protected riparian habitat; and 3) providing buffers to protect riparian areas from adverse land uses.
- Long-term monitoring of flycatchers, Yuma clapper rails, bald eagles, and cuckoos; and biological monitoring at Roosevelt and each mitigation site.

Developing the RHCP and EIS is a public process and the Service and SRP seek public comment and participation. The draft EIS and draft RHCP are available at <a href="http://arizonaes.fws.gov">http://arizonaes.fws.gov</a>. A public meeting to solicit comments related to the draft RHCP and EIS, and issuance of an incidental take permit will be held on August 27, 2002, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. at the offices of Salt River Project, 1521 Project Dr. (Galvin Pkwy. and Van Buren St.), Tempe, Ariz. Comments and requests for hard copies of the draft documents, and should be sent to Mr. Steven L. Spangle, Acting Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Ste 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021, (602) 242-0210. All comments should be sent to Mr. Spangle by September 17, 2002.

For further information on the Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan contact Mr. John Keane, Executive Policy Analyst, SRP, P.O. Box 52025, PAB355, Phoenix, AZ 85072-2025, (602) 236-5087.

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 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 520 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 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.

## <a href="http://arizonaes.fws.gov">http://arizonaes.fws.gov</a>