



News Release

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SEEKS EARLY INPUT ON SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSAL

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public participation in identifying issues and determining the appropriate scope of environmental analysis, including alternatives, in the anticipated designation of critical habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (a neotropical, migratory bird). By developing a critical habitat proposal, the Service intends to protect vital flycatcher breeding habitat from federal activities. Staff will be visiting eight communities in the seven-state U.S. range of the flycatcher to gather information and identify sources of other information that can contribute to its eventual critical habitat proposal – a process called scoping.

The 5 ³/₄-inch flycatcher breeds and rears its chicks in late spring and through the summer in dense riparian vegetation along streams, rivers, wetlands and reservoirs in the arid Southwest (California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and historically in Texas). The flycatcher migrates to Mexico, Central, and possibly northern South America for the non-breeding season.

The flycatcher was added to the endangered species list in 1995 as its populations declined due to habitat loss resulting from river and water management; agriculture, residential and urban development; recreation; and livestock and wild ungulate overgrazing in breeding habitat; and the threat of the expanded range of the cowbird which parasitizes songbird nests. Designating critical habitat for the species will provide a second level of protection under the Endangered Species Act. Designation of critical habitat will not stop development or establish a nature preserve – rather, it serves to alert agencies to federal activities that might adversely affect designated habitat and identifies ways to minimize those effects.

A total of 599 river miles of flycatcher critical habitat were designated in New Mexico, Arizona and California 1997. In 2001, the 10th circuit court of appeals set aside designated critical habitat in those states under the circuit's jurisdiction (New Mexico). The Service set aside critical habitat designated for the species in all three states until a reassessment of the economic effects of designation could be completed. The court recently assigned a schedule whereby the Service is to complete its draft analysis and propose critical habitat by September 2004 and arrive at a final critical habitat determination by September 2005.

A two-year recovery planning effort for the flycatcher that drew upon the participation of industry, tribal, development, water district and livestock representatives, lead by a team of agency and academic biologists was completed last year with the adoption of a final recovery plan. "The broad and intensive participation of parties in the Southwest in the flycatcher recovery planning gives us a great advantage in both determining what habitat is essential to flycatcher survival and identifying industries, local economies and communities that may be effected by a critical habitat designation," said Dale Hall, Service Southwest Regional Director. "In the coming weeks, we're hoping those involved in recovery planning and all effected groups will help us

identify areas that truly require habitat protection and the biological, economic and on-the-ground effects of providing such protection.”

Information, individuals and groups identified in the scoping process will be essential in drafting the environmental assessment and economic analysis required for developing and evaluating a critical habitat proposal and considering where the “costs” of designation might outweigh the “benefits” – an evaluation required under the Act in shaping critical habitat.

Scoping meetings will be conducted from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the following locations and dates. The first half-hour will allow participants to receive conservation and critical habitat process and flycatcher information. Information will then be discussed in a workshop format.*

Jan 26, Phoenix, AZ
Fraternal Order of Police Lodge No. 2
12851 N. 19th Ave
Phoenix, AZ 85029-2654

Jan. 29, Alamosa, CO
Alamosa Family Recreation Center
2222 Old Sanford Road
Alamosa, CO 81101

Feb. 4, Corona/City of Chino, CA
El Prado Golf Course
6555 Pine Avenue
Chino, CA 91710

Jan 27, Silver City, NM
Flame Convention Center
2800 Pinos Altos Road (West of 32nd St &
Hwy 180)
Silver City, NM 88061

Feb. 2, Las Vegas, NV
BLM building
4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89130

Feb. 5, Escondido, CA
Escondido Center for the Arts
340 N. Escondido Blvd.
Escondido, CA 92025

Jan. 28, Albuquerque, NM
Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
2401 12th Street NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104

Feb.3, Lake Isabella, CA
Lake Isabella Senior Center
Veteran's Facility, Room 1
6405 Lake Isabella Blvd.
Lake Isabella, CA 93240

All comments, including those derived from the meetings, are to be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Service within 45 days of the Federal Register notice publication. Send to Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Ste 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021, or email to WIFLcomments@fws.gov or fax to 602-242-2513. Documents relevant to flycatcher critical habitat and recovery planning are available at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov> or by contacting the address above.

Once critical habitat has been proposed (September 2004), the Service will again seek public comment and formal public hearings to review the proposal and supporting economic and National Environmental Policy Act evaluations.

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 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 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.

<http://arizonaes.fws.gov>

*Individuals with access and special needs who wish to attend the scoping meetings are encouraged to contact the Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210 x222) prior to Jan. 22, 2004.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Photographs of the southwestern willow flycatcher and relevant documents are available at http://arizonaes.fws.gov/image_library.htm and <http://arizonaes.fws.gov/southwes.htm>.