

D. EIS Issues

The lead agencies have identified the following areas for potential discussion in the EIS: geology and soils, air quality, water resources, vegetation and wetlands, fish and wildlife, threatened and endangered species, hazardous materials, noise, land use, housing, displacement, and relocation, social and economic (including environmental justice), historic resources, cultural and archaeological resources, recreation, visual resources and aesthetics, transportation, public services, and utilities.

Questions may be directed to the individual named in this notice under the heading **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

Dated: February 28, 2003.

Roy A. Bernardi,

Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service****Notice of Availability of the Final Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Plan**

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the availability of the Final Recovery Plan for the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). The breeding range of this bird includes southern California, southern Nevada, southern Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, western Texas, southwestern Colorado, and possibly extreme northern portions of the Mexican states of Baja, California del Norte, Sonora, and Chihuahua. Within this region, the species breeds in dense riparian tree and shrub communities associated with rivers, swamps, and other wetlands including lakes (e.g., reservoirs). Most of these habitats are classified as forested wetlands or scrub-shrub wetlands.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to obtain a copy of the Recovery Plan may 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 (602/242-0210 x247, Greg_Beatty@fws.gov). The Plan is also available at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Greg Beatty (see **ADDRESSES**).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

Restoring an endangered or threatened animal or plant species to the point where it is again a secure, self-sustaining member of its ecosystem is a primary goal of the Service's endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, the Service prepares recovery plans for most of the listed species native to the United States. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for conservation of species, establish criteria for the recovery levels for downlisting or delisting them, and estimate time and cost for implementing the recovery measures needed.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Section 4(f) of the Act, as amended in 1988, requires that public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. On June 6, 2001, the Service published in the **Federal Register** an announcement of the availability for public review of the draft Recovery Plan for the southwestern willow flycatcher. Public comments were accepted through October 4, 2001. The comment period was subsequently reopened on October 10, 2001, for a period of 60 days extending through December 10, 2001. Seventy-eight letters of comment were received during the two comment periods. The draft Recovery Plan was revised and finalized based on this input.

The 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 Recovery Plan was developed by a Technical Subgroup comprised of 14 technical specialists, and geographically-based teams of stakeholders (Implementation Subgroups), which include representatives of Native American Tribes, State and local governments, ranchers, private land owners and managers, agency representatives, and others.

The southwestern willow flycatcher is known to currently breed in dense riparian vegetation in southern California, southern Nevada, southern Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and

southwestern Colorado. Although extreme northwestern Mexico and western Texas are considered part of its breeding range, no nesting birds are presently known to occur in these areas. The dense riparian vegetation that is needed for breeding was historically rare and sparsely distributed, and is now more rare. Destruction and modification of riparian habitats have been caused mainly by: Reduction or elimination of surface and subsurface water due to diversion and groundwater pumping; changes in flood and fire regimes due to dams and stream channelization; clearing and controlling vegetation; livestock overgrazing; changes in water and soil chemistry due to disruption of natural hydrologic cycles; and establishment of non-native plants. Concurrent with habitat loss have been increases in brood parasitism by the brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) and the presence of nest predation which inhibits reproductive success and further reduces population levels. Actions needed to recover the southwestern willow flycatcher are those that would increase and improve breeding habitat by restoring and/or re-creating natural physical and biotic processes that influence riparian ecosystems, and reducing other stresses on the flycatcher. Specific actions include: Changing management of surface and groundwater where feasible; restoring flood cycles; reducing impacts of domestic livestock, wild burros, and native ungulates; improving metapopulation stability; securing long-term protection of breeding habitat; managing exotic plant species; reducing brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds; and conducting research to refine management practices and knowledge of ecology. The Recovery Plan was finalized based on comments received during meetings with the Implementation Subgroups, as well as comments received from the public.

Authority

The authority for this action is Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: September 19, 2002.

David A. Yazzie,

Acting Regional Director.

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