



News Release

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SERVICE EXTENDS COMMENT PERIOD FOR ENDANGERED SOUTHWESTERN BIRD'S CRITICAL HABITAT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is extending until March 31, 2005, the time period in which comments can be submitted regarding its re-proposed critical habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.

In compliance with a court order, on Oct. 12 the Service proposed to designate 1,556 miles within the 100-year floodplain of waters in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico as critical habitat for the endangered migratory bird, which was listed as endangered in 1995.

The Service is required to consider economic information when making a critical habitat determination and will seek public comment on economics and the proposed designation together. The associated draft economic analysis and environmental assessment are not yet completed. Rather than allow the comment period to expire and then reopen the comment period for the supporting documents, the comment period will be extended. The critical habitat proposal comment period was scheduled to end Dec. 13.

“Allowing the comment period to expire before the full set of supporting draft analytical documents is available could result in hurried and incomplete comments on our proposed rule and would unnecessarily frustrate respondents,” said Southwest Regional Director H. Dale Hall. “We’ve extended the comment period.”

Information supplied during the comment period will be essential in evaluating and finalizing critical habitat areas and determining where the benefits of designating an area might outweigh the benefits of not including it – an evaluation required under the Act in shaping critical habitat. All comments collected during the comment period will be considered and addressed in a final rule anticipated next year.

Comments should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Service by March 31, 2005. 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.

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