



News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>

For Release: April 25, 2005

Contacts: Jeff Humphrey 602-242-0210 ext 222, Elizabeth Slown 505-248-6909, Victoria Fox 505-248-6455

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSES OF REPROPOSED SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER CRITICAL HABITAT AVAILABLE -PUBLIC HEARINGS SCHEDULED-

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft economic analysis for the proposed southwestern willow flycatcher's critical habitat, an endangered migratory bird. A draft environmental assessment is anticipated to be available on April 26. The comment period for the draft documents and the proposed rule closes on May 31. Eight public hearings have been scheduled across five states.

The draft economic analysis estimates the impacts of all flycatcher conservation efforts in the proposed designated areas, not just those exclusively associated with critical habitat designation, between \$29.2 and \$39.5 million annually. Some of those costs are associated with the development of Habitat Conservation Plans and other management efforts that could result in areas not being designated as critical habitat.

In compliance with a court order, on Oct. 12, 2004, the Service repropoed 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.

The Service designated 599 river miles of flycatcher critical habitat in New Mexico, Arizona and California in 1997. Since the initial designation, the existence of additional breeding locations in southwestern Colorado, and southern Nevada and Utah has been recognized. In 2001, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals set aside designated critical habitat within New Mexico – the only state under the court's jurisdiction where critical habitat was originally proposed. The court found the economic analysis of the designation to be inadequate. The Service then 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 Endangered Species Act requires the Service to designate critical habitat on the basis of the best scientific data available, after taking into consideration the economic impact, and any other relevant impact, of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. The Service may exclude areas from critical habitat designation when the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of including the areas within critical habitat, provided the exclusion will not result in extinction of the species.

The Circuit Court of Appeals directed the Service that when deciding which areas to designate as critical habitat, the economic analysis should include "co-extensive" effects. Those include all economic effects resulting from conserving the species, the species' listing (endangered) status and the implementation of critical habitat.

The economic analysis evaluates the co-extensive effects of flycatcher conservation. The environmental assessment (conducted under the National Environmental Policy Act) focuses on effects to the natural and human environment that may result from critical habitat designation alone.

Each public hearing on the analysis and assessment will be preceded by an informational session. The informational sessions will be held from 3:30 to 5 p.m. followed by a public hearing from 7 to 9 p.m. at:

May 2, Escondido, CA, California Center for the Arts, 340 N. Escondido Blvd.

May 3, City of Chino, CA, El Prado Golf Course, 6555 Pine Ave.

May 9, Las Vegas, Cashman Center, 850 N. Las Vegas Blvd.

May 10, Lake Isabella, CA, Lake Isabella Senior Center, Room 1, 6405 Lake Isabella Blvd.

May 16, Mesa, AZ, Mesa Community and Conference Center, 263 N. Center St.

May 17, Silver City, NM, Western New Mexico University, Global Resource Room, 1000 W. College, 12th and E St.

May 18, Albuquerque, NM, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Special Events Center, 2401 12th St. NW.

May 19, Alamosa, CO, Adams State University, Student Union Bldg., Rooms 308 & 309, First and Stadium Dr.

Information supplied by either individuals or groups 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. All comments collected during the comment period will be considered and addressed in a final rule anticipated in early October.

The proposed designation identifies locations that support ten or more flycatcher territories and is designed to maintain those nesting birds' access to other flycatcher populations in order to provide population stability, assure that birds can expand into other locales, and ensure genetic flow among populations. The proposal includes areas within broad floodplains, to accommodate the shifting and flooding nature of Southwest rivers.

The 5 ¾-inch flycatcher breeds and rears its chicks in late spring and through the summer in dense vegetation along streams, rivers, wetlands and reservoirs in the arid Southwest. The flycatcher migrates to Mexico, Central, and possibly northern South America for the non-breeding season.

Critical habitat identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species that may require special management considerations or protection.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

All comments should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Service by May 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. The proposal, draft economic

analysis, draft environmental assessment and documents relevant to flycatcher critical habitat and recovery planning are available at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov> or by contacting the address above.

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 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management 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 Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

<http://arizonaes.fws.gov>

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>.