



News Release

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www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

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Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Input on Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Critical Habitat Proposal

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is again seeking comment on its proposed revision of critical habitat for an endangered migratory bird, the southwestern willow flycatcher. The Service's August 15, 2011, [proposed revision](#) identified 2,090 stream miles within the 100-year floodplain of waters in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico as critical habitat. Of the total proposal, approximately 902 stream miles are currently being considered for exclusion from the final critical habitat designation. The Service announces two additional proposed locations in Arizona and six additional areas now under consideration for exclusion from designation. The Service also announces the availability of a draft economic analysis of the critical habitat proposal, a draft environmental assessment, and a public hearing. The Service is seeking comment through September 10, 2012.

The Service will hold a public hearing on the proposal, draft economic analysis, and draft environmental assessment, on Aug. 16 at the Apache Gold Convention Center (Geronimo Room), located five miles east of Globe, Ariz. on Highway 70. An informational session will be held from 3 to 4:30 p.m. followed by a public hearing from 6:30 to 8 p.m. for receiving oral comments.

The proposed critical habitat uses the conservation strategies from the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Plan and flycatcher movement data to identify river segments within each of 29 management units that would meet the flycatcher distribution and abundance (1,950 territories) recovery goals. Because flycatcher habitat and Southwest rivers are dynamic, a broad distribution of flycatcher populations throughout the bird's range is important to retain population stability and gene flow, and to prevent simultaneous catastrophic loss of populations and local extirpation.

However, the Service recognizes that a substantial amount of the proposed areas are already being managed to accommodate or advance flycatcher recovery through Habitat Conservation Plans, tribal management, and other partnerships. Areas such as these, and areas where resulting economic and other relevant impacts may occur, can be excluded from the final critical habitat designation if the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of inclusion. Since publishing the initial proposal, the Service has added the following locations to the list of possible exclusions—the Santa Clara River and Castaic Creek, Calif. (14.5 mi.), lower Colorado River (70 mi.), Pinal Creek, Ariz. (3.5 mi.), and Rio Grande, N.M. (46.1 mi.). Two additional segments on Cienega Creek and Empire Gulch (totaling 15.5 mi.) in Arizona are being added to the critical habitat proposal at this time, bringing the proposed total to 2,113 stream miles.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on decisions that private landowners make on their land that do not require Federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

In 2005, the Service designated 737 river miles of flycatcher critical habitat (after initially proposing 1,556 river miles). The critical habitat is being revised following a settlement agreement stemming from legal challenges to the 2005 designation. The 2005 critical habitat designation remains in effect during the current rulemaking process, anticipated to be completed this winter.

The 5³/₄-inch flycatcher breeds and rears its nestlings in late spring and through the summer in dense vegetation along streams, rivers, wetlands, and reservoirs in the arid Southwest. The most recent 2007 flycatcher rangewide assessment described 288 separate flycatcher breeding sites (areas that contain a collection of territories) and estimated 1,299 flycatcher territories. A territory is a discrete area defended by a resident single flycatcher or pair of flycatchers during a breeding season. The flycatcher migrates to Mexico, Central America, and possibly northern South America for the non-breeding season.

The proposed rule, revision, maps, draft economic analysis, and draft environmental assessment and other information about the southwestern willow flycatcher are available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/> or <http://www.regulations.gov>, or by contacting the Service's Arizona Ecological Service Office at (602) 242-0210. Comments on the proposal and related documents will be accepted through September 10, 2012, and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2011-0053; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwsHQ, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsHQ>.

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