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Heart of Texas Wind Habitat Conservation Plan for Black-capped vireo Approved *Plan will preserve 564 acres of high quality vireo habitat*

The Heart of Texas Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and associated Incidental Take Permit (ITP) have been approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The HCP covers a 10,808 acre wind energy project in McCulloch County, Texas, that could impact the black-capped vireo, a federally listed species recently proposed for delisting.

Under the HCP, the Heart of Texas Wind, LLC, will reduce any potential impacts to the black-capped vireos as a result of the construction and operation of their wind project by siting turbines to reduce impacts, not clearing habitat during the breeding season, and restoring habitat after construction. Approximately 725 acres of black-capped vireo habitat will be directly and indirectly impacted, and the effects of the resulting take of black-capped vireos would be mitigated with 564 acres of high-quality vireo habitat. The HCP and Incidental Take Permit will be in effect for 30 years. The Service has also finalized an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of implementation of the Habitat Conservation Plan.

On December 15, 2016, the Service proposed to remove the black-capped vireo from the list of threatened and endangered species. Our analysis of the best available science indicates the primary known threats to the black-capped vireo, of habitat loss and brown-headed cowbird parasitism, have been reduced or adequately managed and populations are expected to be viable in the future. As such, the vireo no longer meets the definition of a threatened or endangered species under the ESA. However, the species remains protected by the Endangered Species Act until a final decision on whether to remove the species from the list is made by the Service. Therefore a project that would result in the incidental take of the species requires a permit.

The black-capped vireo is a migratory songbird that breeds in Texas and Oklahoma. The species was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1987 as an endangered species primarily due to habitat loss and nest parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds. Cowbirds secretly lay their eggs in the nests of black-capped vireos causing vireo parents to raise cowbirds rather than vireos. The black-capped vireo is the smallest member of the vireo family occurring regularly in the United States. It winters exclusively in Mexico along the Pacific Coast. Sporting a namesake black cap and white face mask, black-capped vireos build intricate hanging cup nests two to four feet above the ground fastened to the branches of shrubs with strands from spider webs, and return to the same breeding site year after year.

Copies of the Heart of Texas HCP and the Environmental Assessment are available at <https://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>.

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