

USACE Natural Resource Management

Migratory Birds



Least Bell's Vireo

FAST FACTS

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: Least Bell's Vireo was listed as an endangered species wherever found in 1986. In the U.S. this species is only known to be found in California. Once one of California's most common birds, the dramatic decline of the species to only 300 pairs in 1986 was driven by both the loss of habitat and brood parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The Least Bell's Vireo is one of four subspecies of the Bell's Vireo species. The other three subspecies are not endangered.

Least Bell's Vireos are extremely vulnerable to cowbird parasitism. The Brown-headed Cowbird makes no nest of her own, but instead lays her eggs in the nests of other birds such as the vireo. In heavily parasitized areas, up to four cowbird eggs may be found in vireo nests.

The invasion of exotic plant species into the severely fragmented and degraded riparian habitat further decreases suitable nesting habitat. Invasive plants species found in Least Bell's Vireo habitat include castor bean, cocklebur, tamarisk, and giant reed to name a few.

HABITAT NEEDS: Least Bell's Vireo occupies dense shrub and small tree habitat along rivers and streams. California Partners in Flight Riparian Bird Conservation Plan identifies the following management needs:

- Preserve and enhance existing riparian habitat within the vireo historic range.
- Control exotic vegetation.
- Continue cowbird removal and/or develop alternative means of controlling cowbird parasitism.
- Management on a community level in order to reduce predation levels.

Height: Least Bell's Vireos are small birds. They are only 4.5 to 5 inches long.

Color: Wings are short and rounded, with feathers that are mostly gray above and pale below. They have a short, straight bill with a faint white eye ring.

Migration: Least Bell's Vireos winter in southern Mexico leaving summer habitat by September and returning in March.

Information and photos provided by USFWS, Cornell Lab, the Center for Biological Diversity, California Partners in Flight Riparian Bird Conservation Plan.

Natural Resource Management (NRM)

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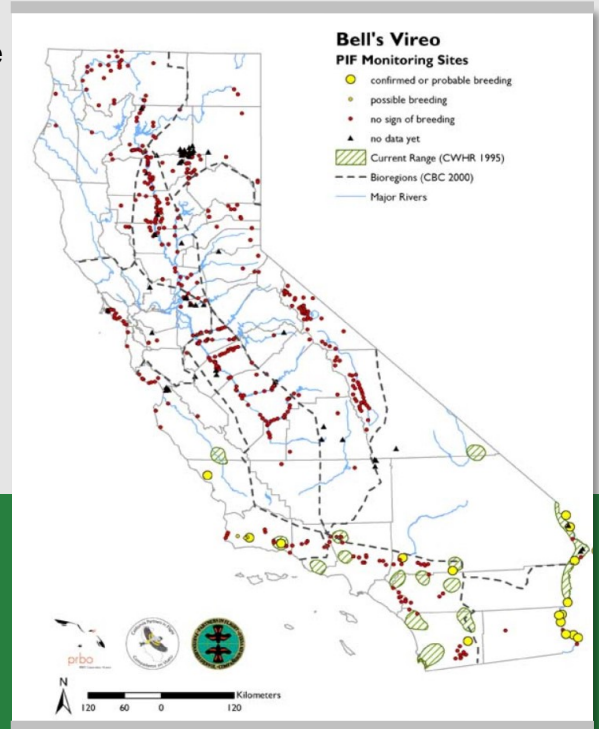


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USACE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ROLE: The USFWS designated critical habitat for the Least Bell's Vireo which includes 10 areas encompassing approximately 38,000 acres. Federal land within the critical habitat consists of approximately 10,979 acres of which 3,338 acres are under the jurisdiction of USACE.

Known Least Bell's Vireo occupied USACE Projects include Carbon Canyon Dam, Hansen Dam, Mojave River Reservoir, Prado Dam, San Antonio Dam, Santa Fe Dam, Sepulveda Dam, and Whittier Narrows Dam Basins, and Chino Creek Levee, all located in southern California within the Lost Angeles District.

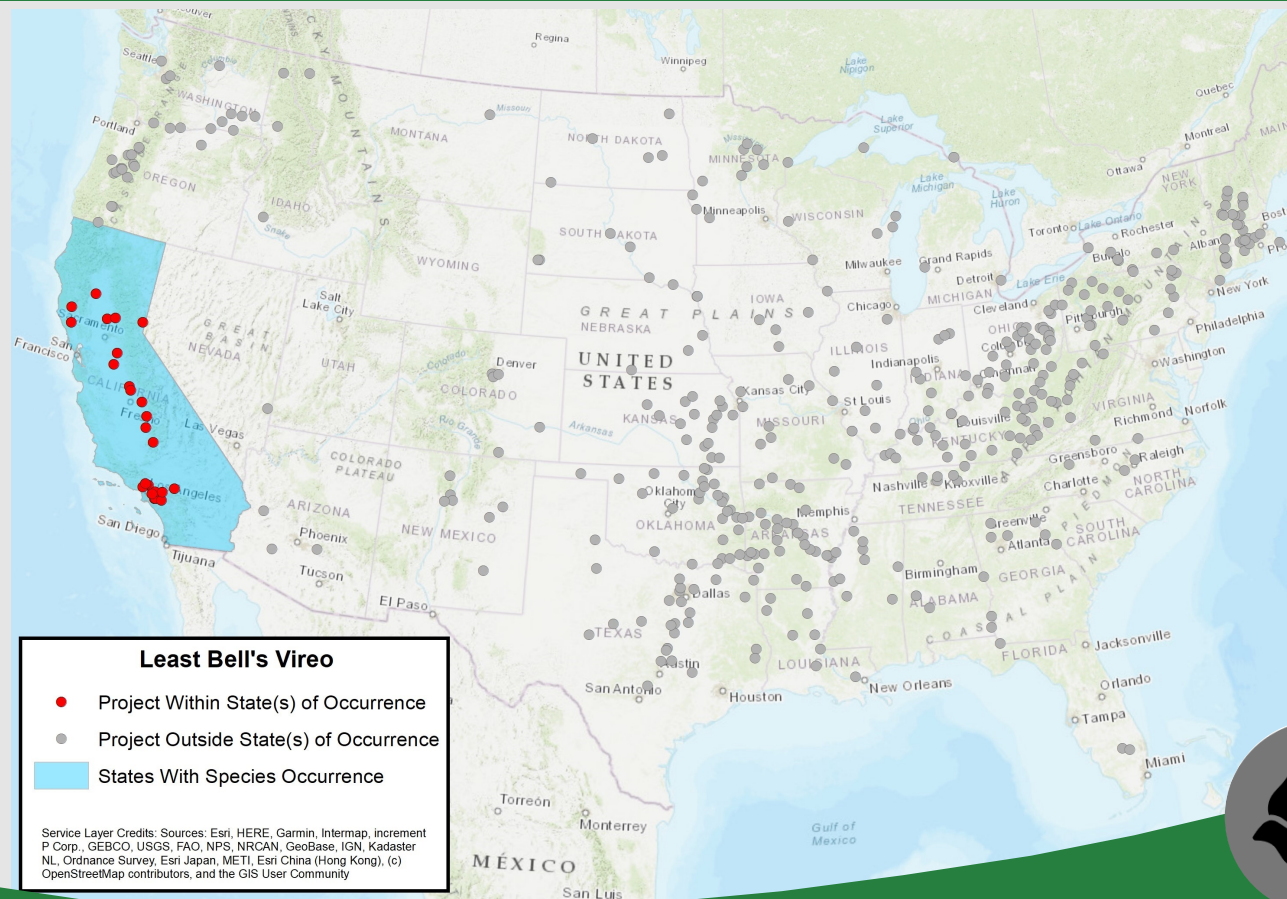


Map Above: This Partner's In Flight map for the Least Bell's Vireo depicts monitoring sites and current range of the species in southern California.

WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

1 In an effort to monitor the Least Bell's Vireo population on USACE operated lands, Los Angeles District staff perform and routinely contract surveys for the Least Bell's Vireo as well as for other listed species.

2 The Whittier Narrows Dam Basin is currently (2020) undergoing a major habitat restoration project for the Least Bell's Vireo and the California Coastal Gnatcatcher, a federally threatened species. The project entails restoration of approximately 60-acres of vireo habitat (riparian willow scrub habitat) and 286-acres of invasive plant removal to aid in vireo recovery.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE fellow, Institute for Water Resources

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