# USACE Natural Resource Management

# Migratory Birds



## Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS**: The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher was listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered wherever found in 1995. This subspecies has suffered from extensive loss and modification of breeding habitat. Habitat has been lost and degraded due to the reduction and/or elimination of surface and subsurface water as a result of groundwater pumping, livestock grazing, altered flood and fire regimes as a result of dams and stream channelization, the control and clearing of vegetation, the invasion of non-native plants, and altered water and soil chemistry from the modification of natural water flow. As habitat has been degraded, parasitism from the Brown-headed Cowbird has also increased which inhibits reproductive success.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION**: The USFWS first designated critical habitat for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher in 1997. The critical habitat has since been revised, most recently in 2013. In 2013 critical habitat consisted of 1,227 miles of stream through a combination of Federal, State, tribal, and private lands in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. A species recovery plan was also developed in 2002.

**HABITAT NEEDS:** While the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher winters in Mexico, Central America, and northern South America, it migrates north to southwestern North America to breed in dense riparian habitat. Much of its breeding habitat is classified as forested wetlands or scrub-shrub wetland. According to the National Park Service, this bird defends a small territory during the breeding season, typically less than one hectare in size. These breeding territories are often clumped with other Southwestern Willow Flycatchers breeding nearby in a semi-colonial fashion. Males often exhibit site fidelity and return to the general area of the previous year's breeding habitat.

- Habitat patches must be at least 0.25 acres
- Habitat patches must be at least 30 feet wide
- Historically nested in native vegetation such as willows, seepwillow, boxelder, buttonbush, and cottonwood communities; now uses non-native thickets of tamarisk and Russian olive as well as mixed stands

## FAST FACTS

**Size:** This bird grows to between 5 and 6.7 inches in length and weighs approximately 0.4 to 0.6 oz. *(All About Birds, Cornell)*

**Color:** This species back and wings are gray-green in color. Its breast is a light, olive-gray while its belly is yellowish and throat is white. The upper beak is dark while the lower beak is light. *(USFWS)*

*Photo Credit*

*Left Photo: Jim Rorabaugh (USFWS)*

*Center Photo: USGS*

*Right Photo: Susan Sferra (USFWS)*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*



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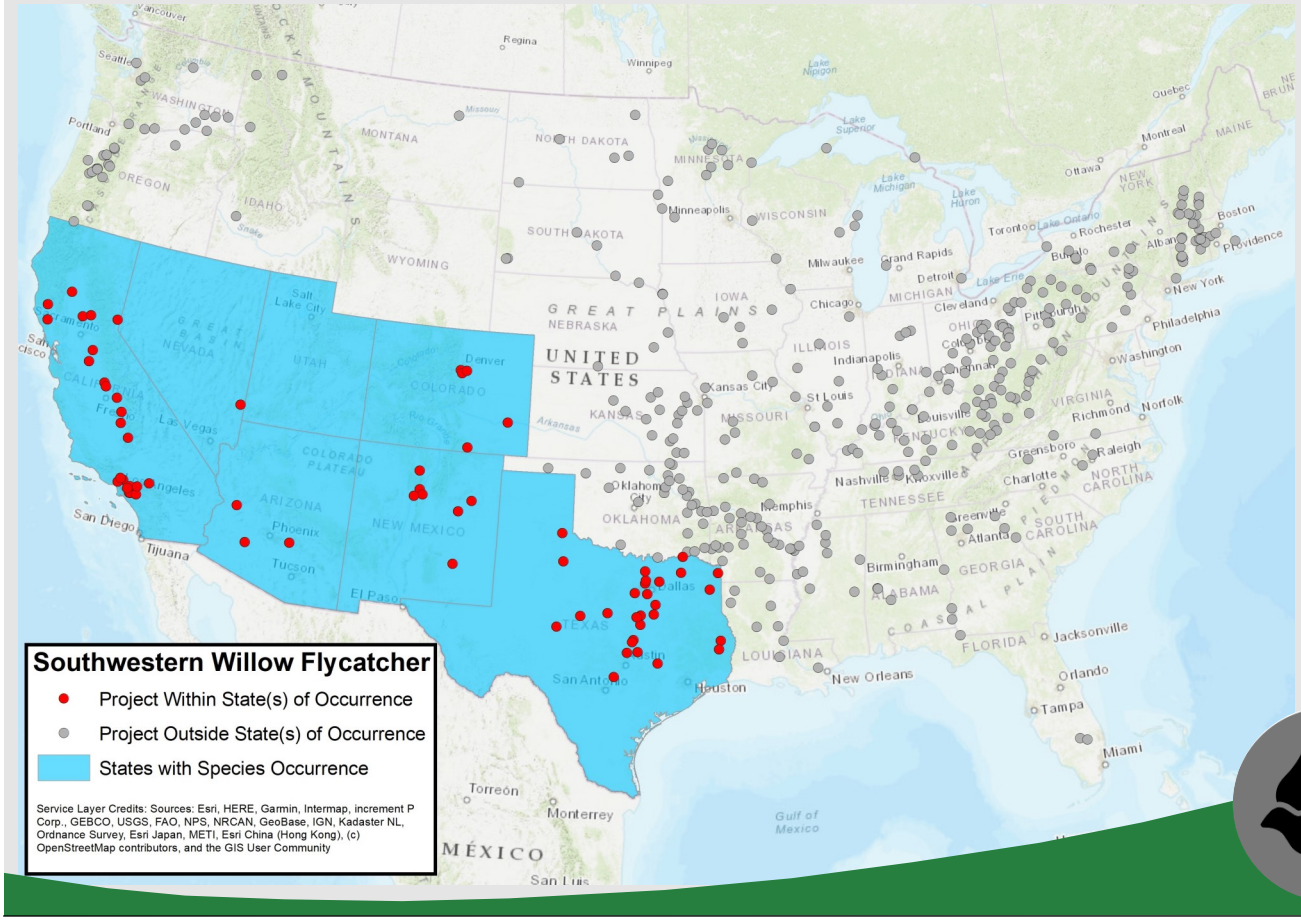
**USACE ROLE:** In 2002 USACE signed a Memorandum of Understanding which established the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Working Group. This collaborative group aimed to unify and facilitate conservation efforts regarding the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow. The program area encompasses the Rio Grande, including its tributaries, from the New Mexico/Colorado border downstream to the Elephant Butte Reservoir.

Since 2002, the group reorganized itself as the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Partnership (MRGESCP) and also expanded its focal species to include three other federally listed species: the New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse, the Pecos sunflower, and the Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Western DPS). The USACE remains an active member of MRGESCP.

**WHAT IS USACE DOING:** In May of 2019 USACE conducted an environmental analysis regarding ecosystem restoration opportunities along the Bosque between Sandia and Isleta Pueblo. The project would restore degraded ecosystem structure, function, and dynamic processes. This would be done via the restoration of 261 acres of riparian forest habitat (bosque) of the Middle Rio Grande. The project constructed 42 willow swales, 3 wetlands and 1 wet meadow. Additionally, 15 acres were treated for invasive species and then planted with native species. These actions would benefit South Western Willow Flycatchers and other species by improving habitat suitability. The feasibility study expected design to be completed by 2020 and construction to finish in 2022 or 2023.

*Photo Credit: Katiana Torres VIRIN 110619-A-CE999-023.jpg*

Sunflowers native to New Mexico are common in swales across the Rio Grande's bosques.




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

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