

SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER
(Empidonax traillii extimus)

STATUS: Endangered (60 FR 10694, February 27, 1995) with critical habitat (70 FR 60886, October 19, 2005). Revised critical habitat was proposed August 15, 2011 (76 FR 50542). The 2005 critical habitat designation remains in effect until the 2011 revision is finalized.

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Small, migratory bird about 15 cm (6 in) long, with grayish-green back and wings, a white throat, a light gray-olive breast, and a pale yellowish belly. Two wingbars are visible and the eye ring is faint or absent.

HABITAT: Nests in dense riparian habitats along streams, lakesides, and other wetlands. Some of the more common plants used for nesting include: willow, boxelder, tamarisk (salt cedar), Russian olive, buttonbush, cottonwood, and mesquite. Nests are found in dense thickets of these and other plants species that are about 4-7 m (13-23 ft) in height. Migration habitat is believed to occur primarily along riparian corridors. Nesting habitat is currently known to occur at elevations below 2,590 m (8,500 ft).

RANGE: Historical: Includes California, southern Nevada, southern Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, western Texas, southern Colorado, and extreme northwestern Mexico.

Current: At the end of the 2007 breeding season, almost 1300 territories were estimated to occur across its range. Since listing, breeding territories have been detected in all states of its historical range, with the exception of Texas. In Arizona, territories were detected on the Agua Fria, Big Sandy, Bill Williams, Colorado, Gila, Hassayampa, Little Colorado, Salt, San Francisco, Santa Maria, San Pedro, Verde, and Virgin rivers, and Cherry, Cienega, Pinal, and Tonto creeks. Most flycatchers likely winter in Mexico, Central America, and possibly South America.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Endangered primarily due to the reduction, degradation, and elimination of riparian habitat from agricultural and urban development. Other reasons for the decline/vulnerability of the flycatcher include: the fragmented distribution and low numbers of the current population; predation; cowbird brood parasitism; and other events such as fires and floods that are naturally occurring, but have become more frequent and intense as a result of the proliferation of exotic vegetation and degraded watersheds, respectively.

The recent introduction, spread, and effect of the tamarisk-eating leaf beetle, threatens the flycatcher by defoliating and killing nesting habitat. The leaf beetle has expanded into the southwestern United States and into the flycatcher's range beyond where the beetle was expected to survive and persist. Accidental and purposeful human transportation appears to be accelerating its distribution. Tamarisk often flourishes in areas where native tree growth is affected by land/water management actions (river damming, flow regulation, diversion, groundwater pumping, over grazing, etc.). Because tamarisk provides essential structure and density, over half of all known flycatcher territories contain tamarisk. Loss of tamarisk vegetation without replacement by native trees will likely impact the flycatcher and other riparian obligate wildlife in Arizona, New Mexico, and southern Nevada, southern Utah, and southern Colorado, and possibly areas in California.

NOTES: A recovery plan is available online at:
http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/SWWF_RP.htm

Listed by the State of Arizona as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.