

6.7 Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) – Category SL

Management Units with Known Occurrences

The southwestern willow flycatcher is 1 of 4 subspecies recognized in North America, with all 3 subspecies that occur in California listed as State Endangered. This particular subspecies is the only subspecies listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (USFWS 2014). Southwestern willow flycatcher has suffered severe declines throughout its range, which includes southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, southern Nevada, southern Utah southwestern Colorado, and southwestern Texas (USFWS 2014). Their current range in coastal southern California has experienced the overall largest proportion of decline in the number of known flycatcher territories since 1999, when there were 320 individuals documented in southern California. Although survey effort has not been uniform over the years, only 61 and 65 adults have been detected in 2016 and 2015, respectively. The drought and potential impacts on the wintering range are thought to be factors in this decline. The largest population is in the upper San Luis Rey River, where 46 birds were detected in 2015 and 48 in 2016 (Kus, unpublished data). The large Kern River population has crashed, with only a few males observed in the last several years and in the absence of females no breeding has been recorded. In comparison in San Diego County, there is a skewed adult sex ratio that favors females has resulted in polygyny, with a single male breeding with multiple females (Kus et al. 2016). As many as 10 females were able to breed with 2-3 males, allowing the species to persist in San Diego County (Kus et al. 2016).

In San Diego County, this subspecies is restricted to 2 modest colonies during the breeding season—the largest colony is located along the upper San Luis Rey River between the La Jolla Indian Reservation and East Grade Road (just below Lake Henshaw) and the other colony is located along the Santa Margarita River within MCB Camp Pendleton (Unitt 2004). To view a map of detections, see <http://arcg.is/2i913fK>.

Management Categorization Rationale

The southwestern willow flycatcher should be managed as a Species Management Focus Category SL because persistence of 1 or more significant occurrences in the MSPA is at high risk of loss without immediate management action above and

beyond that of daily maintenance activities and because management of riparian habitat alone will not ensure its persistence.

Factors contributing to SL category status include loss and modification of riparian habitat, urbanization and agricultural developments, altered hydrological functions, and brood parasitism by the brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus* sp.), which poses a particular threat in local population decline when combined with negative influences from predation and habitat loss (USFWS 2014). Additional threats include agricultural practices and heavy recreational use of flycatcher habitat (e.g., ORVs).

Management and Monitoring Approach

The overarching goal for southwestern willow flycatcher is to protect, enhance, and restore occupied and historically occupied habitat to create resilient, self-sustaining populations that provide for persistence over the long term (>100 years).

For the 2017–2021 planning cycle, the management and monitoring approach for the southwestern willow flycatcher is to:

- (1) conduct breeding surveys along the upper San Luis Rey River and in other drainages through 2019 to determine southwestern willow flycatcher status within the MSPA;
- (2) Prepare a management plan with inclusive provisions for the reduction of potential impacts from SHB and/or *Fusarium* infestation in southwestern willow flycatcher occupied areas or potential habitat and incorporate SHB and/or *Fusarium* results determined from monitoring surveys into the plan, with a focus along the San Luis Rey River;
- (3) implement the highest priority management actions for southwestern willow flycatcher, and
- (4) monitor the success of the recommended management actions of the plan.

For details and the most up-to-date goals, objectives, and actions, go to the MSP Portal Southwestern Willow Flycatcher summary page: http://portal.sdmmp.com/view_species.php?taxaid=712529

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher References

Kus, B. E., S. L. Howell, and D. A. Wood. 2016. Female-biased sex ratio, polygyny, and persistence in the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). *The Condor* 119 :17, DOI :10.1650/CONDOR-16-119.1.

Unitt, P. 2004. *San Diego County Bird Atlas*. Proceedings of the San Diego Society of Natural History #39.

USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). 2014. *Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (Empidonax traillii extimus) 5-Year Review: Summary and Evaluation*. Phoenix Fish and Wildlife Office, Phoenix, Arizona.