

BVAS comments in opposition to delisting the Southwest Willow Flycatcher

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Comment:

The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher has already lost 90-95 percent of its historic habitat along rivers and streams in California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. Based on recent bird surveys coordinated by state and federal agencies, fewer than 1,000 breeding pairs of the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher exist throughout its range. Now is not the time to delist a species that clearly has not recovered and is subject to further loss and degradation of riparian habitat. The Audubon Society's "Birds & Climate Change" report predicts the Willow Flycatcher (all subspecies included) to be threatened by climate change; and specifically predicts an 84 percent loss of current summer range by 2080, with a major northward movement of the range.

The recent delisting petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relies on a single deeply-flawed study claiming that the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is not a genetically unique subspecies, which has been discredited as a result of scientific analyses conducted by professional ornithologists. At the time the bird was listed as endangered in 1995, an expert panel convened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confirmed that the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is a distinct subspecies worthy of protection, and there is nothing in this latest petition that is valid in refuting that determination. Therefore, we believe that delisting of the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is not justified at this time.