



# Desert Wetlands News & Views

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## Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

with contributions from Debbie Vandooremolen, SNWA

Of the four subspecies of Willow Flycatchers, the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) is the only one designated as federally endangered. The species was listed in 1995 for its entire seven-state range. In its current state there are some tense issues. The destruction of riparian habitat and the removal of water from streams and ground water have greatly reduced the habitat available to the flycatcher. Brown-headed cowbirds, common to the wash, also affect the flycatcher by parasitizing their nests—dumping out their eggs and depositing cowbird eggs in their place. Only 900 to 1000 pairs remain scattered in portions of their entire southwestern habitat. Embedded in the species Latin name is the epithet “mosquito king”, an appropriate moniker for this flycatcher.



Male Southwestern Willow Flycatcher  
(Photo courtesy of SNWA)

The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) recently released a report entitled, “2008 Survey for Southwestern Willow Flycatchers along Las Vegas Wash”. This article is excerpted from that report, which was prepared by SWCA Environmental Consultants. The study was undertaken to further examine the breeding status of the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher along Las Vegas Wash. In 1997, as part of the environmental permitting process associated with the then proposed development

of the Wetlands Park, it was recognized that the site had potentially suitable Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat that could be affected by the installation of erosion control structures and the development of other Park facilities.

At that time, agency biologists recommended that a systematic survey be undertaken to determine if the subspecies breeds within the Park boundary. Initial surveys for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher were conducted in 1998, and follow-up surveys have been conducted every year, beginning in 1999. The survey techniques included playback recordings of the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher in accordance with the standardized survey protocol (Sogge et al. 1997).

The 2008 Southwestern Willow Flycatcher survey represents the eleventh annual systematic survey for this subspecies within Park boundaries. Migrant Willow Flycatchers have been detected during every survey year except for 1999, 2001, and 2005. The largest detected groups may have coincided with migratory waves. Thus far no nesting pairs have been identified. However, in 2007, we had the first documented resident Southwestern Willow Flycatcher within Park boundaries, and in 2008, we experi-

Desert Wetlands  
Conservancy

The mission of the DWC is to influence policy, create partnerships, and initiate activities in advocacy or the Las Vegas Valley Watershed, including the Desert Wetlands Park.

## ***LWCC Annual Tour***

The Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee (LWCC) had their 11<sup>th</sup> annual tour of the Las Vegas Wash in October, reviewing some of the accomplishments of the past year. The Committee consists of 30 partner members, including federal, state, and local agencies, and citizen members. The Desert Wetlands Conservancy is a citizen member. The LWCC was formed and tasked in 1998 by the Board of Directors of Southern Nevada Water Authority to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the Las Vegas Wash.

Our first stop was the Upper Diversion Weir, completed last year. The weir has features to control the flow of the Wash and a foot bridge crossing for the east end of the Wash connecting directly into the nature trails in the Park's Nature Center. Gerry Hester, SNWA, was proud to announce that recently the Nevada Chapter of the American Public Works Association awarded the 2009 APWA Environmental Project of the year to the Upper Diversion Weir in the \$10-\$20 million Environmental Category. The APWA Projects of the Year Award was established to promote excellence in public works projects by recognizing the partnership between the project's managing agency, the contractor and consultant/architect/engineer who, working together, complete superior public works projects. Projects are recognized in four different categories and are further divided by cost.



*Upper Diversion Weir*

We also visited the In-Lieu Fee Mitigation Pond System (formally known as the Ducks Unlimited Project) and the DU Wetlands Weirs. The Mitigation Ponds are in place and construction is underway to complete the planting. The DU Wetlands #2 Weir was completed this year and DU Wetlands #1 is scheduled to start construction next spring. The start of this second weir is critical since the cut caused by erosion is moving upstream at a rate of

about 100 feet per year and is only a few hundred feet away from damaging the #2 Weir. These two weirs are designed to protect the Mitigation Pond System from flood damage. This area will also be the location of the Spring 2010 Green-Up.



*Powerline Crossing Weir Bridge*

Our third stop was the Powerline Crossing Weir, completed two years ago. This weir also includes the foot bridge crossing the Wash at the west end of the Wetlands Park. The logistics challenge was getting the bridge sections through the Lake Las Vegas property and installed before the powerlines went in. Elsie Sellars, CCP&R, described the trailhead nearing design completion for this site.

Our last stop was the Bostick Weir and Kiosk. Along the way, we passed the sites of two more weirs which hopefully will be started by the end of this year: the Lower Narrows Weir and the Homestead Weir. These weirs will be located sequentially upstream from the Demonstration Weir completed in 1999. The vegetation has completely overgrown the Bostick Weir which points out the need for continued maintenance to control some growth that may damage the weir during flooding. While at the Bostick Weir, committee members were given an update on several of the education outreach efforts and vegetation monitoring programs.

To date, 12 of the 22 planned weirs have been completed. Even at this point, impacts of the creation of wetlands behind those constructed weirs on water quality improvements in the Wash are noticeable. Xiaoping Zhou, a senior hydrologist with SNWA, spoke on the water quality improvement while we were traveling between sites. There have been significant reductions of Total Suspended Solids (TSS), selenium, and perchlorate levels resulting from slowing the speed of the flow by the weirs, diluting urban runoff with highly-treated and increased wastewater effluents, perchlorate remediation programs, and the filtering effect of the wetlands. □

## DWC Annual Meeting

The Desert Wetlands Conservancy held its annual meeting on September 19<sup>th</sup> and elected a new Board of Trustees and a new panel of officers, listed on page 1. Our new chairman is Arthur Wolf. Arthur Wolf is Principal, WOLF Consulting, which provides services to museums and cultural organizations in the western U.S. Arthur brings 35 years of museum experience as curator, institutional leader, trustee, and consultant to our organization.

The Board thanked Joan Lolmaugh for her significant contributions during her tenure for the past 2 years. In summary, under her leadership, we have regained our momentum, broadened our vision and scope, and publicly taken on environmental issues through our various advocacy efforts. Specifically we have changed our name to reflect the new focus of the organization, created and distributed a new strategic plan, added new board members, worked to increase our membership, participated in LVWCC study teams, engaged in advocacy efforts, and conducted a public event to dedicate the Wetlands Park In-Lieu Fee Mitigation Project and share our strategic plans with the community. Work is process included building links to internalize expertise, and creating a DWC website and Blog. □

and the State of Nevada’s stormwater mitigation requirements for weir construction. A thanks goes out to everyone that donated their time and energy to this event and please keep a lookout for information on the Spring event! □



Volunteers heading out to the planting sites, photo by Tim Ricks, SNWA

## Fall Green-Up



The Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee held its 15<sup>th</sup> Wash Green-Up on October 17, 2009. The event was a great success,

the weather cooperated and the turn-out was terrific. The site for this planting, located just northwest of the Clark County Nature Preserve, was on Clark County Water Reclamation District land.

Actually, this planting was 2 times the size of past efforts, nearly 28 acres with over 6000 plants. With nearly 1200 volunteers, split into 3 shifts, the planting was completed ahead of schedule. The largest single variety in the planting was honey mesquites. Also planted were Emory waterweed, Seep Willow, Broom Baccharis, Wolfberry, Mist grass, and Alkali sacaton. To date, nearly 50% of the 245 acres revegetated have been achieved during volunteer planting events. Volunteers have helped planting over 46,000 native trees, shrubs, and emergents.

The revegetation program goes towards fulfilling the Army Corps of Engineers 404 permitting requirements

### Share Our Vision!! Membership Application Name:

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May we show your name on our membership list?

Yes No

Check here if you wish to be contacted for volunteer projects

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Osprey:	\$500
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Please mail to DWC,  
PO Box 28017, Las Vegas, NV 89126  
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pzwetlands@earthlink.net

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*New and Renewing Members: Cliff Fields, H.E. LaPlant, William Brandt, Pamela Nickels, Esther Doherty, Dawn Anderson, Joan & Leslie Dunn, Art Wolf, Jean Guiffreda, Arthur H. Wolf and Holly M. Chaffee*

### **WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT**

**PLEASE CHECK THE EXPIRATION DATE ON YOUR MAILING LABEL TO SEE IF IT IS TIME TO RENEW!** If you have not yet taken the plunge to join, please do so now. You will demonstrate that you want to help in the development of new features in the Park for our community!

**The Park is a place to enjoy! Have you visited the Park recently?** The temporary Visitor Center is at the very end of Wetlands Park Lane. Cross Boulder Highway and travel 1 mile east, then look for the Wetlands Park sign, just where Tropicana turns into Broadbent Ave. If it has been a while since you've visited the Park, you will be amazed at the changes and improvements that have taken place. The Park is for your benefit, come and enjoy it!

There are many opportunities to get involved and to show your support—not only through membership in the Friends, but by contributing funds or labor for needed physical improvements, and educational materials. If you have put off renewing, remember your membership ends one year from the date you paid your dues.

## ***Willow Flycatcher*** *continued from page 1*

enced another first, when a Southwestern Willow Flycatcher male established a breeding territory just upstream of Pabco Road Weir. The bird was unable to attract a mate and ultimately abandoned the site before the end of the season. A total of eight Willow Flycatchers were detected in 2008, seven of which were migrants.

Previous survey reports have identified losses of potentially suitable Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat. Although some losses continued into 2008, the habitat quality of the revegetation sites planted by the SNWA continued to improve, with a few sites now offering potentially suitable habitat. Six of the eight Willow Flycatchers were detected in SNWA revegetation sites, including the territorial Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. Additionally, the Lake Las Vegas mitigation wetland site adjacent to the Clark County Wetlands Park was surveyed in 2008 for the first time. This wetland is developing into very good Willow Flycatcher habitat—it has large ponds with emergent vegetation growing on the edges and Gooding willows dominating the upper canopy—and the habitat will continue to improve as these willows grow larger and fill in the canopy cover.

After 11 years of surveys, the last two years have revealed an increase in Willow Flycatcher activity along the Wash. To the extent that this may be correlated with improvements in the habitat quality of the riparian revegetation sites, it suggests that Southwestern Willow Flycatcher activity along the Wash may continue to increase in the future. The complete report is available on-line at the SNWA website, a direct link is: [http://www.lvwash.org/assets/pdf/resources\\_ecoresearch\\_flycatcher08.pdf](http://www.lvwash.org/assets/pdf/resources_ecoresearch_flycatcher08.pdf)

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