

## Middle Rio Grande Bosque Habitat Restoration Holds Promise for Threatened and Endangered Songbirds

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The Albuquerque District US Army Corps of Engineers designed and constructed the Middle Rio Grande Bosque habitat restoration project at 17 sites along a 22-mile reach of the Rio Grande from 2011 to 2016. Since construction, restoration area habitat has matured, especially where shrub plantings are connected to groundwater. We will discuss habitat development at these sites and progress toward the goal of improving habitat for birds, including threatened and endangered songbirds.

Hawks Aloft, Inc. conducted Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) surveys at 16 restoration sites in 2004-2015, 2022, and 2023. Tetra Tech conducted surveys in 2016-2019. Cumulatively, Willow Flycatchers were detected at 12 of the 16 sites. Until 2019, most detections were in May, indicating migrating birds. Since 2020, surveys have included detections during the third survey period (July 31- August 15) at four sites, when only territorial and potentially breeding individuals of the federally endangered southwestern subspecies (*E. t. extimus*) would be expected. Nesting was confirmed at one site in 2020 and a possible family group was observed in 2023. These detections illustrate that habitat characteristics at most of the restoration sites are suitable for migrating Willow Flycatchers and that in some cases are suitable for territorial and potentially breeding individuals of the endangered southwestern subspecies.

Only a few Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) surveys have been conducted since restoration activities were completed. In 2023, Hawks Aloft, Inc. conducted cuckoo surveys at 13 restoration sites and documented cuckoos at five sites. At four of those sites, cuckoos were documented during the second survey period (July 1 - 31) when birds would be expected to be territorial and potentially breeding. Although we could not confirm any breeding attempts, the 2023 detections illustrate that some restoration areas provide habitat that is potentially suitable for both migrant and territorial cuckoos.

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