

COLLABORATIVE WILDLIFE PROTECTION AND RECOVERY INITIATIVE

OCTOBER 2019

HISTORY

The Collaborative Wildlife Protection and Recovery Initiative (CWPRI) is a voluntary, informal partnership of federal and state agencies and non-governmental parties interested in recovering listed species and preventing new listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). CWPRI began with a verbal agreement of cooperation in 2016 between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Office of the Secretary of Defense after the realization that federal agencies often were working independently to protect species. As of September 2019, CWPRI has grown to include American Bird Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Defenders of Wildlife, Military Services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

IDENTIFYING THE PILOT

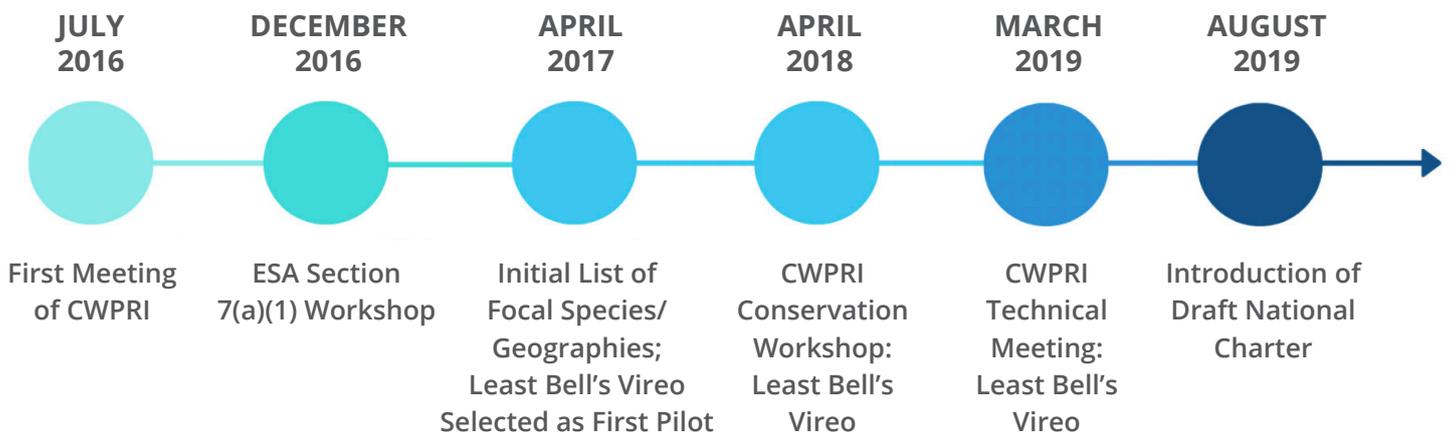
Parties within CWPRI recognized the importance of a “pilot project” to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration. CWPRI generated an initial list of focal species and geographies based on species-specific federal expenditures, areas of overlapping interests, and the potential for range-wide solutions that could benefit a target species and have additional benefits to other species in the same habitat. From this list, the least Bell’s vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) was selected as the initial pilot species. Federal and non-federal management actions have contributed to significant population increases over the past three decades, but we still lack sufficient progress in recovering the species despite considerable agency expenditures and mission adjustments by the CWPRI parties acting independently in support of the vireo.



US Army Corps of Engineers
Engineer Research and Development Center



US Army Corps of Engineers
Los Angeles District



SPECIES INFORMATION

The least Bell's vireo was listed in 1986 as a federally endangered sub-species under the ESA. This small bird measures about 4.5 to 5 inches long, with short, round wings, a short, straight bill, and a faint white eye ring. The feathers are mostly gray above and pale underside. Least Bell's vireos inhabit structurally diverse and mostly early-successional woody riparian habitats along watercourses. They occur in a variety of riparian habitat types, including cottonwood-willow, oak, and mule fat scrub communities.

PROVING THE CONCEPT

The first CWPRI field workshop at the USFWS Carlsbad Field Office in Carlsbad, California, took place in April 2018. At the workshop, CWPRI parties discussed approaches to maximize their collective efforts including the benefits of a habitat suitability model, species status assessment, range-wide monitoring program, and cowbird and invasive species management plans. The workshop generated a roadmap of short-, middle-, and long-term actions to support the range-wide recovery of



least Bell's vireo. At the workshop, the parties agreed to develop an ESA Range-wide Section 7(a)(1) framework for the least Bell's vireo to increase regulatory flexibility, decrease regulatory conflict and delays, and streamline the ESA Section 7(a)(2) consultation process for individual agency projects. The framework can serve as a landscape-level strategic plan that can benefit other species that share riparian habitat with the least Bell's vireo. The goal is to prove that by acting together, federal parties can effectively and efficiently recover species by selecting approaches that simultaneously strengthen each agency's capacity to meet its mission.

In March 2019, the CWPRI convened a follow-up technical session to hear updates from CWPRI parties regarding priority action items identified in the April 2018 Workshop; share knowledge and ideas regarding least Bell's vireo biology, conservation, and habitat; become familiar with tools and models to inform and guide recovery efforts; and assign recovery tasks for a 2019 Workplan and beyond.

The least Bell's vireo proof of concept has already yielded success in the form of funding to implement priority actions. Collaborative funding from federal and state sources have allowed parties to develop a habitat suitability study, build capacity, and conduct targeted surveys and riparian rehabilitation projects. Parties continue to engage through this effort to advance priority actions and share information.

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

Least Bell's vireo in the Southwestern U.S. serves as CWPRI's first on-the-ground exercise as a "proof of concept". It provides a platform to convene parties who are already spending resources and man-hours to recover priority species. Parties find areas of opportunity to align existing efforts, identify gaps, develop solutions, and advance recovery. This model of proactive planning aims to increase regulatory predictability, streamline the ESA consultation process, achieve recovery of listed species, and preclude the need to list new species. It also serves as an example that can be replicated with other species and geographies across the U.S.