

Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*)**Species Status Statement.**Distribution

Olive-sided flycatcher is a migratory songbird that breeds in forests across Canada and Alaska, the Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains, and along the Pacific coast of the United States. The species winters mainly in southern Central America and northern South America (Altman and Sallabanks 2012). In Utah, it can be found sparsely distributed throughout the state but is only known to breed in high elevation mountainous areas.

Table 1. Utah counties currently occupied by this species.

Olive-sided Flycatcher
ALL

Abundance and Trends

The global population size estimate of olive-sided flycatcher is 1,900,000, with roughly 43% living in the United States (Partners in Flight 2019a). Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data show range-wide olive-sided flycatcher declines of -3.1% per year (95% CI: -3.97 to -2.53; Sauer et al. 2017) and an overall population loss of 78% from 1967 to 2015 (Rosenberg 2016). At the current estimated rate of decline, olive-sided flycatcher abundance will decline by another 50% in 24 years (Partners in Flight 2019b).

Similar to range-wide trends, Utah BBS data have shown significant 4.84% declines per year from 1967-2015 (95% CI: -7.0 to -2.68; Sauer et al. 2017). Abundance and trends are difficult to ascertain for olive-sided flycatcher because of their patchy distribution and low abundance. BBS data can be less reliable for rare species, but such a large decline is notable on a regional and local level. The current Utah population estimate for the olive-sided flycatcher is 6,700 individuals (Partners in Flight 2019a).

Currently olive-sided flycatcher is:

- Listed as *Near Threatened* on the Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature
- Identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a priority species at the continental and Bird Conservation Region scales on the Birds of Conservation Concern list (draft U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2017)
- Listed by Partners in Flight as “REVERSE DECLINE: Yellow Watch List ‘D’ – Species with population declines and moderate to high threats” (Rosenberg et al. 2016)

Statement of Habitat Needs and Threats to the Species.

Habitat Needs

Olive-sided flycatcher breeds in coniferous and mixed coniferous forests across its range, from sea level to subalpine elevations. In Utah, this species breeds at higher elevations in spruce/fir forests. Within these habitats, individuals are often associated with forest edges and clearings (Altman and Sallabank 2012). Such openings are necessary for the flycatchers to aerially hunt insects. Early-successional stands are occupied by olive-sided flycatchers when large trees or snags are present to serve as hunting and singing perches. These birds are less common in closed-canopy forest communities, such as lodgepole pine forests (Kotliar 2007).

Forest edges and clearings utilized by olive-sided flycatchers are created through a variety of natural and human induced causes, including fire and a variety of silvicultural prescriptions. In Idaho, flycatchers were significantly more abundant in watersheds containing clearcut stands, than in watersheds without clear-cuts (Evans and Finch 1994). Flycatchers were also more abundant in a forest in Idaho with scattered 10 to 26-year-old clearcuts and intervening selectively logged stands, than in fragmented and intact old growth forests (Hejl and Paige 1994).

In a review of several research studies, olive-sided flycatchers preferred recently burned forests with a mix of burn severities (Kotliar et al. 2002). Such heterogeneity provides the variety of open canopy areas, snags, and increased edge habitats necessary for this species. Moderate burns are also thought to increase insect abundance, further supporting insectivorous birds like olive-sided flycatcher (Granholm 1982). This species was also found to select burned forest over unburned mature forests in Colorado (Kotliar and Melcher 1998).

Threats to the Species

Numerous studies have indicated the importance of mixed-severity burns to olive-sided flycatcher breeding habitat (Altman and Sallabanks 2000, Kotliar et al. 2002). Moderate to high-severity areas are used more readily than low-severity areas; these are associated with wildfires more often than with prescribed burns. Many decades of fire suppression has decreased the amount of habitat provided by fire. Improper forest management can also threaten breeding habitat. Olive-sided flycatchers do not use large clearcut units, but are more likely to use the small clearings created by group selection, or by small clearcut units. Size, spatial diversity, ratio logged, snag retention, and local conditions affect the suitability of logged areas as breeding habitat (Kotliar 2007). However, given the wide range of compatible anthropogenic activities creating potentially suitable breeding habitat conditions, full life-cycle research (e.g., examining the relative effects of decreasing insect abundances, and the losses of stopover and wintering habitat) is needed to resolve the mechanisms of the documented declines.

Table 2. Summary of a Utah threat assessment and prioritization completed in 2014. This assessment applies to the species' entire distribution within Utah. For species that also occur elsewhere, this assessment applies only to the portion of their distribution within Utah. The full threat assessment provides more information including lower-ranked threats, crucial data gaps, methods, and definitions (UDWR 2015; Salafsky et al. 2008).

Olive-sided Flycatcher
High
Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity
Medium
Droughts
Improper Forest Management

Rationale for Designation.

Olive-sided flycatcher has experienced a long-term decline over its entire range. Breeding Bird Surveys estimate a 78% decline in this species rangewide, and a 3.1% annual decline in Utah. This long-term decline is cause for concern and merits designating olive-sided flycatcher as a Sensitive Species.

Economic Impacts of Sensitive Species Designation.

Sensitive species designation is intended to facilitate coordinated management of this species which is recommended to prevent drift toward Endangered Species Act listing and lessen related economic impacts. An ESA listing of olive-side flycatcher would have statewide impacts to management activities including forestry, prescribed fire, wildfire rehabilitation, and summer livestock grazing. There would also be increased costs of regulatory compliance for some land-use decisions.

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