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For Immediate Release

Endangered Songbird Finds New Home in the South Bay

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SAN DIEGO, CA – The state-wide environmental organization, River Partners, announced today that the Least Bell's Vireo, a songbird whose population dipped to an estimated six hundred pair when it was first listed as an endangered species in 1986, has been confirmed residing on its Otay Delta habitat restoration site located between the south San Diego Bay and Interstate 5.

Since 2009, River Partners has been working with the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, the California Wildlife Conservation Board, Caltrans, the San Diego Foundation and other partners to restore Least Bell's Vireo and other songbird habitat on the Otay River. Two years after planting the 50-acre Otay Delta habitat restoration site, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitoring has confirmed at least two territorial males, one of them paired, inhabiting the site. In addition to the Vireos, monitors also identified a total of 44 other bird species utilizing the Otay Delta restoration site in the spring of 2014.

"This is the first time since it was listed as endangered that the Least Bell's Vireo has been confirmed west of I-5 on the Otay River. It shows that we can help these at-risk species retreat from the edge of extinction by expanding their habitat" said Heyo Tjarks, a biologist with River Partners. Tjarks went on to say "We were amazed at the bird's response to the new habitat. Having 45 species utilize the site for nesting and as a migration stopover point is like hitting the ball out of the park."

"River Partners, with their ability to build strong community partnerships and apply cost-effective habitat restoration techniques, has transformed the Otay Delta into a vibrant riparian woodland forest. Along with River Partners and the Otay Valley Regional Park, the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge is restoring the rich biodiversity of South Bay and providing opportunities for the public to enjoy their natural heritage" said Andy Yuen, Project Leader at the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

About River Partners

River Partners is a 501c3 (nonprofit) organization based in Chico, Calif., with offices in Modesto and San Diego. The mission of River Partners is to “create wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment.” Operating since 1998, River Partners has restored over 8,000 acres of riparian habitat and planted over 1 million trees. River Partners works in over ten watersheds from Redding to the U.S./Mexico border. Its staff of 30 professionals includes wildlife biologists, agricultural specialists and business managers. They work with a variety of local, state and federal agencies, as well as private firms and NGOs. For more information, please visit www.riverpartners.org.

About the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Headquartered on Gunpowder Point Drive in Chula Vista, CA, the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge protects a rich diversity of over 200 migratory, threatened, and/or endangered plant and wildlife species and their habitats in the midst of a highly urbanized coastal environment. The Refuge is surrounded by the cities of Chula Vista, National City, San Diego, Imperial Beach, and Coronado. The Refuge encompasses approximately 2,620 acres of land and water in and around San Diego Bay.



Photo: Least Bell's vireo, 0711