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Wings Over Willcox Celebrates Arizona Centennial

Willcox, Ariz. Wings Over Willcox has been one of southeastern Arizona's favorite events for the past 18 years but this year will have a special significance. The 19th annual Wings Over Willcox (WOW) Birding and Nature Festival has been honored with selection as an official Arizona Centennial event. The WOW committee and volunteers have planned a spectacular festival with a Centennial theme and invite everyone to come join them on January 12-15, 2012. Complete information is available online at www.wingsoverwillcox.com, where registration can be completed or by calling 1-800-200-2272.

This year's WOW takes place just a month before our beautiful state of Arizona commemorates 100 years of statehood on February 14. To help celebrate the Centennial, new WOW tours and seminars have been added that focus on Arizona history. Two new tours – "The Story of Dos Cabezas" and "History of Willcox Playa" – and three new seminars – "Willcox 1880 to Statehood," "Paving the Way to Statehood," and "Geronimo, the General, and the Hummingbird," offer a look back over the past 100 years. Other popular tours from prior years such as "Ghost Towns – A Century Later" and "Willcox Walking History" will return.

Even the WOW commemorative shirts are special for the Centennial, featuring a historical 1915 painting by noted naturalist Louis Fuertes. The festival is the perfect opportunity to see the winter migrants that visit Arizona, including an estimated 40,000 sandhill cranes. More than 100 species of birds have been observed during prior WOW weekends and, to challenge tour participants, the festival is sponsoring The Centennial Challenge to see how many birders can observe 100 species during the 2012 festival.

Birders can capitalize on opportunities to see these birds by signing up for guided tours. Tours cover a diversity of habitats including desert grasslands, ponds, woodlands, and mountains. Several special tours provide a chance to spend time with keynote speaker Ted Floyd, American Birding Association editor of "Birding," who will lead the tour "Bare-Naked Birding," and participate in two other winter bird tours.

Participating in free seminars is a great way to learn more about natural history and sharpen your birding skills. The free Nature Expo, which includes live animals and many vendors selling art and nature-related items, runs throughout the festival. The Saturday night banquet will feature Ted Floyd, who will introduce everyone to the amazing world of Birding at Night.

Tours are filling fast. Don't delay in registering for a wonderful weekend of winter birds, natural wonders, meeting new friends, and reconnecting with old friends. "Early Bird" registration ends December 31. Registration forms submitted after this date will require an additional \$5.00 per event per person.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Photos available upon request; email Diane Drobka at ddrobka@blm.gov or call 928-348-4403.