

## Upper Verde River needs wild, scenic designation, Chino Valley activist says

Support for federal action exists



Gary Beverly at the Verde River. (Courtesy photo)

STAN BINDELL, For the Review

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Gary Beverly, a Chino Valley resident, continues to push for the Upper Verde River to get federal Wild and Scenic River designation.

Getting the Wild and Scenic River designation is a long drawn-out process as it would need to be approved by Congress and signed by the president.

Beverly has plenty of support, with more than 65 businesses in west Yavapai County and the Verde Valley, and several environmental groups, along with the Yavapai-Apache Tribe, supporting the measure.

Beverly, chairman of the Yavapai Group of the Sierra Club, said informal talks with Salt River Project, Prescott and Chino Valley have uncovered no concerning effects on water rights and claims.



The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects rivers in five major ways:

- It bans new federally-licensed dams and harmful water development projects.
- It ensures water quality is maintained and, where possible, enhanced.
- It protects each river's outstanding values such as, culture, wildlife, recreation, etc.
- It creates a junior, federally-reserved water right for the minimum flow necessary to maintain a river's outstanding values.
- It requires the development of a Comprehensive River Management Plan to guide management along designated rivers for a period of 10 to 20 years.

There are 226 designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in 41 states throughout the U.S. Under the Act, the federal government has no authority to regulate or zone private lands.

The Upper Verde River provides:

- Important habitat for fish, wildlife, and birds;
- A wide range of recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, hiking, swimming, birding, paddling, horseback riding, and a scenic railway;
- Stunning geology and scenery; and,
- Clean water for downstream users — farms and ranches, cities, and indigenous communities.

**Public comments**

The Bradshaw and Chino Valley ranger districts of Prescott National Forest are taking public comments on the proposal until Jan. 10 on the Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study Draft Environmental Assessment. For more information, call 928-443-8000.

No one has publicly opposed the designation. The Forest Service manages the Upper Verde River. The designation would help maintain a flowing river, protect economic values throughout Yavapai County, improve wildlife habitat management and assure public access for the cultural and recreational resources.

Beverly said the designation would improve the management of the river.

Beverly emphasized that some people assume this is a land grab. "That's not true," he said.

Beverly said the Forest Service would continue to manage the Upper Verde for recreation including hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching and maintain or improve the wildlife and scenery.

"The designation would recognize that this river is special and needs protection," he said.

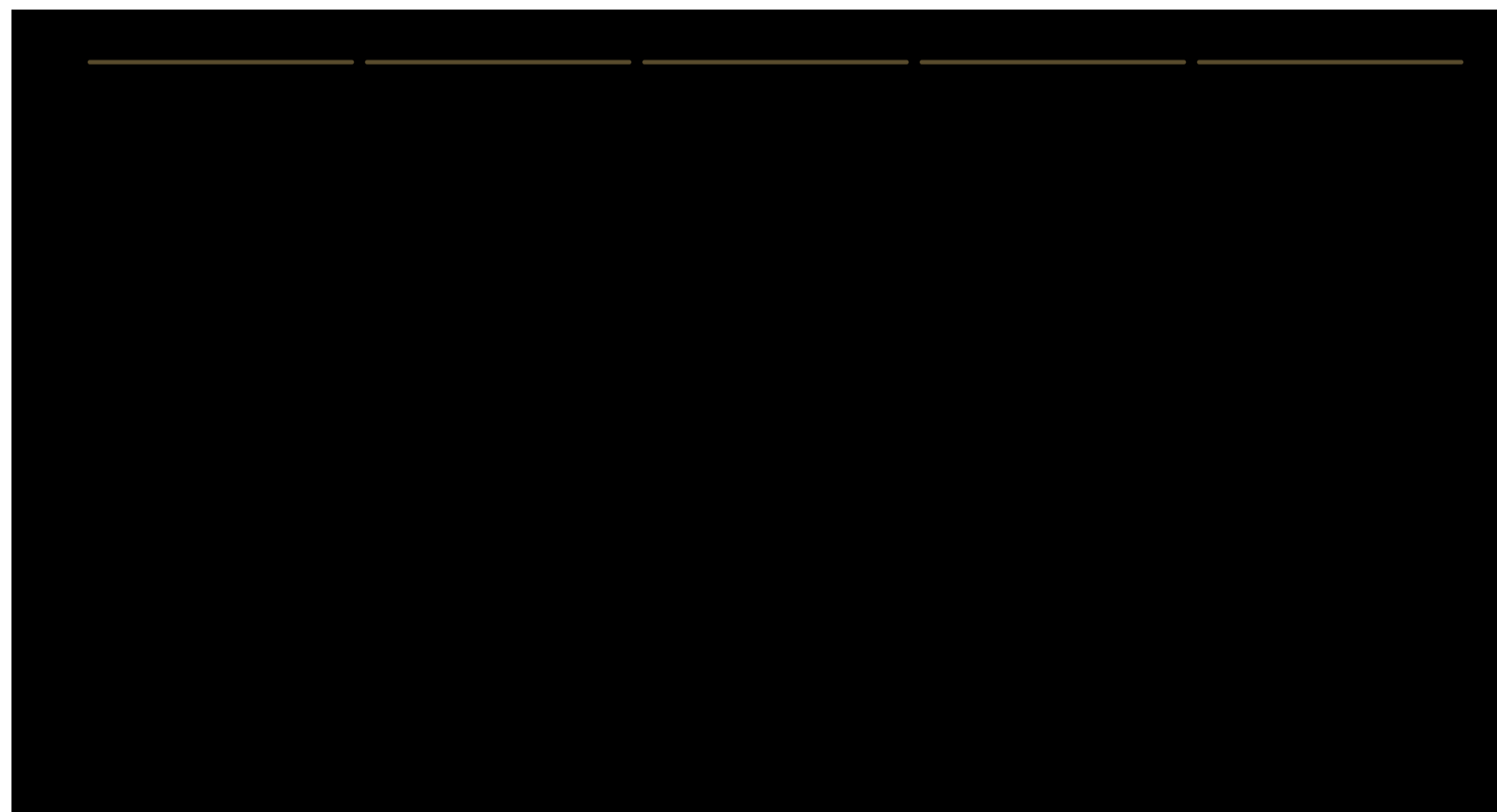
The proposed Wild and Scenic designation would be for a 40-mile stretch that starts at the headwaters near Paulden and goes to just above Clarkdale. It would include tributaries at Lower Granite Creek and Sycamore Creek.

Just over 40 miles in the lower Verde River received the Wild and Scenic designation in 1984. Fossil Creek is the only other river in Arizona that has the federal Wild and Scenic designation.

In 2010, the Prescott National Forest determined that the Upper Verde is eligible for the Wild and Scenic designation.

Beverly said there are 11 reasons to protect the Verde:

- 1 - Economy:** The Verde sustains over 700 jobs and over \$100 million in economic value in the Verde Valley, plus 40% of the Phoenix area's surface water supply. Plus, natural areas are proven to benefit local economies.
- 2 - Recreation:** As the population grows, the area requires more recreational areas. The Upper Verde is a wonderful place for people to hike, hunt, fish, camp, backpack, kayak, canoe, view wildlife, photograph, ride horses, climb rocks, and observe birds.
- 3 - Quality of Life:** Clean air, unfettered open spaces and bodies of water, and opportunities to view wildlife enhance daily living.
- 4 - Scenery:** Primal colors and spectacular rock formations create scenery second to none in the state — red rocks, green plants, blue sky, and white clouds. The Verde displays tremendous natural beauty.
- 5 - Cultural & Historic Values:** The entire river corridor is laced with ancient rock art, campsites, structures, and artifacts revealing the historical lifestyle of Native Americans. The river and its springs are an essential spiritual and cultural foundation for the Yavapai-Apache Nation. Also, remnants of early Arizona ranching history dot the canyon.
- 6 - Wildlife:** Although the Verde River watershed comprises only 5.8% of the land area in Arizona, it contains the best remaining riparian areas — lush, green ribbons full of life. The Verde supports a surprisingly large fraction of Arizona's vertebrate species: 78% of breeding bird species, 89% of bat and carnivore species, 83% of native ungulate species, and 76% of reptiles and amphibians, an impressive concentration of wildlife. Many bald eagles overwinter on the Verde. Seven eagle chicks have ledged at Del Rio Springs in the past five years. The Verde River, the lifeblood of the watershed, supports most of Arizona's wildlife species.
- 7 - Endangered Species:** The Verde River supports a rich and diverse variety of plants, animals, and fish. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) lists 21 species in the Verde watershed, including the yellow-billed cuckoo, the southwestern willow flycatcher, native fish and snakes. Wildlife managers monitor an additional 16 sensitive species of concern.
- 8 - Native Fish:** Of Arizona's original 33 native fish, three are extinct, 19 are protected by the ESA, and the Verde supports 10. The Upper Verde River sustains four ESA-listed native fish.
- 9 - Uniqueness:** Of Arizona's six major perennial rivers, the Gila, Salt and Santa Cruz rivers have been consumed by dams and groundwater pumping, the Colorado is fully diverted and no longer flows to the Gulf of California, and the San Pedro is struggling for life. The Verde River is the longest surviving living river in Arizona.
- 10 - Stewardship:** "The challenge is to manage this rich and amazing world sustainably so kids, and grandkids can also live comfortably and enjoy nature and wildlife.
- 11 - Water is Life:** To indigenous people, the land, plants, and animals are alive; they are identified as beings to be respected.



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