

# Wild Rivers Film Tour

by Joe Trudeau

Looking for a fun event to kickstart an adventurous spring? Come out to the historic Elks Theatre downtown on Friday, March 31, for the Wild Rivers Film Tour, a celebration of wild rivers and call to action for protecting the rivers we all cherish.

This grassroots-style tour, now in its eighth year, was born of a partnership between American Rivers and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, two nonprofit organizations committed to protecting and enhancing ecosystems that depend on clean, free-flowing rivers. For the Southwest the tour is organized by the Southwest River Protection Program at American Rivers, which promotes solutions for rivers and the communities that depend on them.

The goal is to share awe-inspiring river stories, told through exciting films, and engage more people in the fight to protect them. Here in Arizona we want to highlight the irreplaceable Upper Verde River and the effort to make it our next designated Wild and Scenic River.

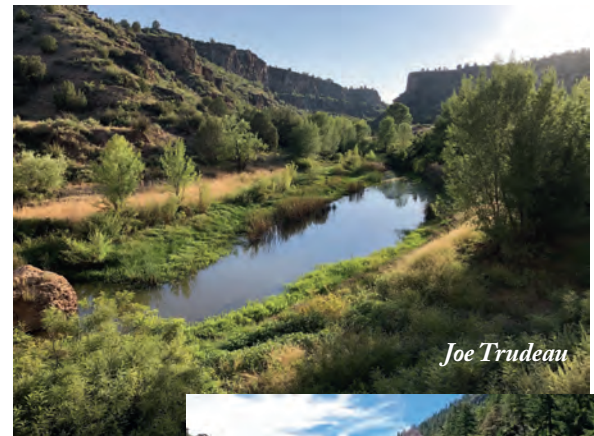
The Upper Verde provides critical habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife, including eight species protected under the Endangered Species Act; a wide range of outstanding recreation opportunities; stunning scenery and wild geology that spans the depth of the Grand Canyon's layers; remarkable historic sites and cultural significance spanning thousands of years of human occupation; and clean water for downstream users — farms and ranches, villages and municipalities large and small, and Indigenous communities.

Rivers are the lifeblood of Arizona's desert landscapes, and powerful economic engines fueling vibrant and attractive communities. Sadly, most of Arizona's rivers have already been lost, destroyed or severely degraded. Today the Upper Verde faces unprecedented threats from drought, diminished flow, groundwater pumping, watershed pollution, abusive forms of recreation, and invasive species. Thankfully it remains a refuge for wildlife and sanctuary for people to enjoy.

For a fun, uplifting, and river-filled evening, you can experience the tour at

Prescott's Elks Theatre on March 31, including a mixer with people working to protect the Upper Verde at 6pm and the show at 7pm. Tickets are \$10 with assigned seating at [prescottelkstheatre.org/theatre-events](http://prescottelkstheatre.org/theatre-events). Tickets will also be available at the door.

**Joe Trudeau** is a consultant to *The Wilderness Society* and a founding member of the *Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River Team*. You can learn more about the coalition's work to protect the Upper Verde at [wildverderiver.org](http://wildverderiver.org).



Joe Trudeau



Tillie Walton and Samantha Schneider in *Wild Rivers with Tillie*

## Small Screen: *Wild Rivers with Tillie*

by Stan Bindell

Close your eyes and imagine a place with water. Think about your connection to that water, whether it's a river, lake or pond.

Tillie Walton invited the audience to do this during a recent presentation at Prescott College about her series on PBS, *Wild Rivers with Tillie*. One fellow audience member shared with me that the exercise gave him a visual of a great blue heron flying over the Verde River, a natural thought given the Verde is our nearest river and close to heart for me and many others.

Walton is an award-winning conservationist, hydrologist and river guide. In this first season's ten episodes she explores the effects of rivers on people and wildlife. She founded and heads the Aquarius Water Experience Foundation, a nonprofit elevating the importance of water and rivers through experiences that inspire awe and wonder, reconnecting us to ourselves and our planet.

In the episode she showed the audience, on the Colorado River, Walton makes a strong case for protecting wild rivers. Two points stood out for me.

One is that the Colorado River is a place of unparalleled beauty. In advocating for protecting a place, we have to illustrate why, and this kind of beauty helps.

We also learned that climate change, drought and pollution are significantly reduc-

ing water flow in the Colorado River. This is a little terrifying considering that several states, including ours, rely heavily on the Colorado for drinking, household use, agriculture, mining and business. It brought home to me how we all have to be more conservation-minded with water, and that those who misuse it in major ways, including Big Agriculture, have to be held accountable.

We can protect our streams and rivers. For many years advocates have proposed Wild and Scenic River designation for the Upper Verde, which would add a many layers of legal protection for it. Walton also urges involvement with the Grand Canyon Trust, the Sierra Club and other environmental groups to help protect these vital waterways.

Walton is a graduate of Prescott College, and this also highlights its strong reputation for environmental education. She credits PC with teaching her to incorporate "what we care about in what we do."

This PBS series can also serve as a great learning resource for young people and anyone interested in the great rivers of Arizona and the West. Check your local listings for when *Wild Rivers with Tillie* airs locally, or stream from Arizona PBS.

Journalist **Stan Bindell** also writes our regular column *Hiking Yavapai* (p. 15).