

Journal

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# Cottonwood Supports Verde River as 'Wild & Scenic'

Cottonwood News



*Friends of the Verde River Executive Director Nancy Steele speaks in favor of designating the upper Verde River as a wild and scenic river at a Cottonwood City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 7. The council unanimously voted in favor of a resolution supporting the designation. Friends of the Verde River is currently gathering support from municipalities near and along the Verde River prior to submitting a proposed resolution to Arizona's congressional delegation. Daulton Venglar/Larson Newspapers*

March 21, 2023	
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By **Alyssa Smith**

The Cottonwood City Council approved a resolution supporting the designation of the Upper Verde as a Wild and Scenic River at its meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 7. The council's letter of support will be sent to Arizona's Congressional delegation to request the official designation.

Designating the Upper Verde River and its tributaries will provide protection for the river downstream before it reaches Camp Verde and other areas. The designation will protect both the river itself and the land

surrounding the river, the riparian corridor.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act aims to ensure a clean water supply, protection of critical habitat, continued access to the river and the preservation of the river's character. The act was passed by Congress in 1968, when dam building was at its peak, to protect the nation's free-flowing rivers. It bans new federally-licensed dams and other harmful water development projects, protects the river's outstanding values, creates a junior and federally-reserved water right, ensures the maintenance of water quality and requires the creation of a comprehensive river management plan.

As of 2019, the act protects 226 river segments extending over 13,000 river-miles.

A river can be designated as wild and scenic either by Congress or by the state in which it is located. A river is eligible if it is free-flowing and has one or more outstanding or remarkable values such as scenery, wildlife, recreation, geology or culture.

The Verde River is very popular for its various recreational uses including kayaking, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing. This creates important economic opportunities for Cottonwood and surrounding towns in the Verde Valley. The proposed area of the wild and scenic designation would cover 74.1 river miles and more than 23,000 acres of riverside land. It would also protect the tributaries that lead into the Verde north of Clarkdale, such as Granite Creek and Sycamore Creek.

In other business, the council approved Ordinance 731, which creates a regulatory framework for short-term and vacation rentals. The ordinance requires the property owner to establish a 24-hour emergency point of contact for the rental, neighbor notification and the posting of the rental information on the property.

The council also approved a public participation plan for the general plan update process, which describes communication and involvement strategies that will enable the public to participate in updating the city's next general plan.

The general plan is the guide for the future development of the city. Cottonwood's general plan is updated every ten years and was last adopted in 2014. The city will be hosting multiple public meetings to hear residents' input. The first set of focus meetings, dealing with land use, economic development and housing, were held on Thursday, March 9, and Saturday, March 11.

The second set of meetings, dealing with natural resources and city services, will be held on Thursday, March 16, at 6 p.m., and on Saturday, March 18, at 10 a.m.

The third set of meetings will cover circulation and public safety, and will be held on Thursday, March 30, at 6 p.m., and on Saturday, April 1, at 10 a.m.

Residents will also be able to provide comments via an online survey.

In the call to the public regarding items not on the agenda, 18 residents — fewer than at previous meetings — spoke about their opposition to the upcoming drag show hosted by Miss Nature LLC's Arizona Pride Tour 2023, which will take place on April 8 at the Cottonwood Community Clubhouse. Council did not comment or respond to any speakers, as the item was not agendized for debate. One speaker was verbally reminded to address the whole council and not individual members.


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