

Letter: Governor responds in favor of wild, scenic designation of Upper Verde River

By **STAN BINDELL**
For the Review

Gary Beverly, a Chino Valley resident and chairman of the Upper Verde River Wild and Scenic Coalition, was ecstatic after receiving a letter from Gov. Katie Hobbs stating her support for the designation.

Hobbs stated in the letter that she would like to add her voice in support of Upper Verde River Wild and Scenic River designation, protecting this unique place for present and future generations.

"Arizona's remaining free flowing rivers, such as the Verde, are treasures of biodiversity that provide rare habitat for threatened and endangered species and life sustaining flows to urban areas," she wrote.

Hobbs stated in the letter that with only six major perennial rivers, the Verde stands as Arizona's longest surviving, living river.

"Although the Verde River watershed comprises only 5.8% of Arizona's land area, it supports a large number of our



See **VERDE**, page 7 Gary Beverly planting a tree at the Verde River. (Stan Bindell/For the Review)

• Verde

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state's vertebrate species, including 78% of breeding bird species, 89% of bat and carnivore species, 83% of native ungulates, and 76% of reptiles and amphibians. This includes 21 species listed under the Endangered Species Act," she wrote.

Hobbs said the Upper Verde River also sustains rural communities. In Yavapai County, 216,000 residents participate in outdoor recreation on or along waterways creating an annual \$1 billion economic impact and generating 9,400 jobs, according to the Arizona Audubon Report and 2019 Yavapai County Fact Sheet.

"As governor of Arizona, I support keeping the Upper Verde River free-flowing for families to recreate, for wildlife, and for the vitality of Arizona's economy," she wrote.

Beverly said it's significant that the leader of the state of Arizona supports the designation of the Upper Verde River as Wild and Scenic.

"This can have an influence on the senators and representatives," he said.

Congress is the only entity that can give that federal designation to the Upper Verde River.

"We appreciate her attention, concern and support," he said.

Beverly said Hobbs works with Congress and federal officials on federal issues that impact the state and has a liaison in her office who works on those issues.

Beverly is hoping that Hobbs' support will speed up the process as he will be among a small entourage that will meet with members of Congress in March to see if the legislation to support the designation will be introduced in Congress.

However, Beverly would make no predictions.

"Congress does what it wants to do, but I'm increasingly optimistic," he said. "Predicting what Congress is going to do is risky business."

Beverly, who has been working on the designation for more than 10 years, has convinced a lot of people as the Wild and Scenic River designation is backed by 140 businesses as well as the towns and cities of

Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, Cottonwood, Clarkdale, Camp Verde and Sedona. The proposal is also backed by the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors and Yavapai-Apache Nation.

Beverly wants people to know what the Wild and Scenic designation would do and would not do.

The Wild and Scenic designation for the Upper Verde River would:

- Preserve this section of the river in its current condition for its Outstanding Remarkable Values which focus on botany, fishery, wildlife, scenery, recreation, cultural and historic, and geology.

The management plan would be created by the community and managed by Prescott National Forest.

"It would be customized to this river and it would be the community's river," he said.

Beverly said the designation would not:

- It would not change the existing water rights.
- It does not change private property rights.
- It does not guarantee the flow of water.

BEVERLY SUPPORTS LAND EXCHANGE

On another issue, Beverly is happy with the environmental assessment that Prescott National Forest has completed regarding a land exchange with Yavapai-Apache Nation.

"The Forest Service did an impressive job," he said.

The Yavapai-Apache Nation would trade lands that it owns near Prescott National Forest for Forest Service land near its reservation in Camp Verde.

"This is a solid win-win for both sides," he said.

Beverly said no one has opposed the land exchange. The land exchange gives the Forest Service more contiguous land making it easier to manage and it gives the tribe more land that it could use for housing.

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