

**File Code:** 1900; 2350; 1510

**Date:**

The Honorable Mark Kelly  
United States Senate  
516 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kelly:

This letter is being submitted in accordance with U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service directives for notifying Congress of preliminary administrative recommendations for rivers that have been determined to be suitable for wild and scenic river designation.

The Decision Notice for the Prescott and Coconino National Forests’ *Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study and Environmental Assessment* was signed on November 15, 2023. The decision includes the preliminary administrative wild and scenic river recommendations listed below.

Table 1. Preliminary Administrative Recommendations for the Upper Verde River Segments Determined Suitable

Suitable River Segment	Miles	Segment Description	Preliminary Classification
1	6.0	From Prescott National Forest’s western boundary near Paulden, AZ to confluence of King Tributary and Verde River	Wild
2	5.7	From confluence of King Tributary and Verde River to APS power line and West-wide Energy Canyon	Wild
3	17.1	From the confluence of Hell Canyon and the Verde River to .5 mile below the confluence of Railroad Draw and the Verde River	Scenic
4	7.2	From .25 mile above confluence of Sycamore Canyon and Verde River to Prescott National Forest boundary near Clarkdale, AZ	Recreational
<b>TOTAL</b>	36.0	The four suitable segments are bounded by an area that extends one-quarter mile from the ordinary high-water mark on each side of each segment	

The entirety of the study area was previously identified as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System by the Prescott and Coconino National Forests in 2010. In addition to the suitable segments listed in the table, the study area also included two small



eligible segments found to be not suitable under the selected alternative (Segment 3a: 1-mile segment from the APS Powerline to the mouth of Hell Canyon; and Segment 3b: 1.2-mile segment from .5-mile below Railroad draw to .25-mile above the confluence with Sycamore Creek). If one or both of the fish passage barriers proposed for construction by the Bureau of Reclamation within the study area are determined by the Forest Service (in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Bureau of Reclamation) to no longer be necessary for restoring and sustaining the Upper Verde River native fishery, the Forest Service will consider these two segments to be suitable with a scenic preliminary classification.

This study process has been informed by professional judgement, best available scientific information, and extensive engagement and coordination with Tribal, state, and local governments, organizations and individuals familiar with these resources, and other members of the public. This is a preliminary administrative recommendation that informs Forest Service interim management and provides input to Congress, who has reserved the authority to make final decisions on designation of wild and scenic rivers under Section 2(a)(i) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1273(a)(i)).

The supporting Prescott and Coconino National Forests documents, including the decision notice, can be accessed at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61191&exp=overview>.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Jake Donnay, Director of Legislative Affairs, at (571) 414-7077 or [jacob.donnay@usda.gov](mailto:jacob.donnay@usda.gov).

A similar letter has been sent to Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Congressman Eli Crane.

Sincerely,

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CHRISTOPHER B. FRENCH  
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

cc: Michiko Martin, Regional Forester, Southwest Region; Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest; Aaron Mayville, Forest Supervisor, Coconino National Forest