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Upper Verde River: *A Proposal for Wild & Scenic River Designation*

The Verde River is an ecologically and socially indispensable element of central Arizona. Its watershed covers approximately 6,600 square miles of central and northern Arizona, while the Verde River proper flows for 170 miles, 125 of which are free-flowing, before its confluence with the Salt River. The upper Verde, defined as from Sullivan Dam near the town of Paulden to the town of Clarkdale in the Verde Valley, flows through a mix of private, state, tribal and federal (Forest Service) lands. Numerous communities rely on the Verde River as a water source, an economic pulse, and for enhanced quality of life. The Verde River is also vital to myriad wildlife, including terrestrial, aquatic, and avian species; a significant number of these species are listed by the state and/or federal government as needing special attention.

The Arizona Wilderness Coalition, along with partner organizations, Native American tribes, and citizen volunteers, has developed a Wild and Scenic River proposal for the upper Verde River. Outreach to individuals and groups that have an interest in the proposal has been ongoing for over a year, with field visits, presentations, and phone and electronic communications. **Below is a brief list of some of the highlights of the Verde River and the proposal to designate the upper Verde River as Wild and Scenic:**

The proposal would include 43 miles of the upper Verde River as a mix of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational designations; 4 miles of Sycamore Creek as Wild; and 1.6 miles of Granite Creek as Wild.

The Verde River is home to numerous native species such as desert nesting bald eagle, osprey, river otter, beaver, black bear, razorback sucker, desert sucker, roundtail chub, and many others. The upper Verde River provides refuge for numerous sensitive, threatened, and endangered species such as southwestern willow flycatcher, Mexican garter snake, and lowland leopard frog to name a few.

The upper Verde River is the historic homelands of the Prescott-Yavapai and Yavapai-Apache tribes. Numerous prehistoric ruins and relics are strewn throughout the upper Verde's course.

Wild and Scenic designation would obligate the US Forest Service to ensure that the water quality would be maintained or improved from the time of designation. It would also create a *federal reserved instream water right*, which would allow the Prescott National Forest to maintain an amount of water in the river (not for withdrawal) necessary to protect the values for which it was designated Wild and Scenic.

The Verde River is home to one of the southwest's largest expanses of rare willow-cottonwood gallery forest. Along with extensive riparian areas, of which only an estimated 2% of the original remain in the southwest, the Verde River is a biological hotspot in the southwest.

The upper Verde River boasts exceptional recreational opportunities for people of all ages, abilities, and preferences. Recreation on the upper Verde includes swimming, fishing, hiking/backpacking, wildlife viewing, hunting, photography, and many others.

If the upper Verde is designated as a Wild and Scenic river, it would require the Prescott National Forest to create a Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP). This would compel the Forest to get input from private land owners, state agencies, other federal agencies, as well as the public to create a plan that protects the river's values.

GET INVOLVED!

For information on AWC's work on a proposal to designate the Upper Verde as a Wild & Scenic River, please contact:

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