

THE M.H. DUTCH SALMON GREATER GILA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ACT

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The Greater Gila watershed comprise the largest remaining network of naturally free-flowing river segments in the Southwestern United States. We are proud to introduce legislation to protect portions of the Gila River, some of its tributaries, and other nearby rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Gila is treasured by New Mexicans because it supports exceptional experiences for families to cherish, spectacular scenery and wildlife habitat, abundant cultural resources, the integrity of an important water source, and many traditional uses. Designating portions of the Gila River and its watershed as Wild and Scenic Rivers will protect one of the nation's most iconic and treasured rivers, as well as the immense recreational and agricultural economies that rely on it.

When crafting this bill we sought out as much feedback as possible from the communities closest to the proposed river segments. We received substantial input from diverse stakeholders. We believe our bill balances protections for rivers with protections for current uses so we can continue to enjoy all that the Gila River and other rivers in the Gila region have to offer. To make this clear, we included a number of provisions providing guidance to managing agencies about what designation would and would not do.

- This Act will protect the traditional river values and uses while also permanently protecting the free-flowing nature of these river segments.
- This Act will permanently protect the outstanding recreational values found along many of the river segments, which include hunting, fishing (including of Gila trout), hiking, camping, backpacking, horseback-riding, pack-mule trips, floating, rafting, kayaking, stargazing, canyoneering, OHV trail riding, and other recreational pursuits.
- This Act will allow current uses such as grazing and irrigating to continue.
- This Act will permanently protect the extraordinary scenic values found along many of the river segments.
- This Act will permanently protect the exceptional geological values and their remarkable display of 30 million years of change.
- This Act will permanently protect the unique habitat of native species assemblages, including habitat of the Gila Trout, loach minnow, spikedace, Gila chub, narrow-headed gartersnake, northern Mexican gartersnake, Chiricahua leopard frog, yellow-billed cuckoo, and southwestern willow-flycatcher.

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- This Act will permanently protect the numerous historical and cultural values, which include the Mogollon civilization dating to 9,500 B.C., the home of the Apaches, Mimbrenos, Mountain Men, Buffalo Soldiers, and the birthplace of the American Wilderness System.
- This Act will allow for robust public participation in the development of the Comprehensive River Management Plan, including by local and tribal governments as well as political subdivisions of the state like Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the general public.
- This Act will not condemn private land or interests in land.
- This Act will not change how private landowners decide to use their own land. That is a matter of state and local government, not federal designation.
- This Act will not change the jurisdiction of the State of New Mexico over state lands, water rights, or fish and wildlife.
- This Act will not limit public access to public lands, nor does it open up private lands to public access.
- This Act will not cancel grazing permits, including for currently vacant allotments on federal land.
- This Act will not amend or affect the Arizona Water Settlements Act.
- This Act will not have any effect on existing valid water rights, interstate water compacts, or existing irrigation or water delivery operations.
- This Act will not reduce the ability of land managers and partners to undertake projects and activities that restore native fish populations.
- This Act will not alter Native American treaty rights.

Separately from establishing wild and scenic rivers, our bill also transfers certain facilities from the Gila National Forest to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. This transfer will complete a process the United States Forest Service and the National Park Service have been working together on for a few years, and will ensure better maintenance and experiences for visitors.