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Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River

Application Date	5/31/2024		
Applying Organization	American Rivers	Grant Type	Member Directed
Requested Amount	\$50,000.00	Project Name	Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River
Contact Name	Mike Fiebig	Project Location (State or Territory)	AZ
Contact Title	Director, Southwest River Protection Program	Project State/Province	AZ
Contact Email Address	mfielig@americanrivers.org	Project Multiple Locations	
Notes		Status	Ballot Review
		Created By	Anne Paterson, 5/31/2024, 3:16 PM

Organization Details

Organization Name	American Rivers	Annual Operating Budget	\$48,693,672.00
Applying Contact	Mike Fiebig	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	92	Main Phone	202-347-7550
Total Membership	38,846	Website Address	https://www.americanrivers.org/
BIPOC-led	No	Address	1101 14th St. NW, Ste. 1400 Washington, District of Columbia 20005 United States
C-Suite Staff			

Proposal Questions

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| <p>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</p> <p>A healthy river is among a community's most important assets, providing flood protection, economic benefits, and places for recreational enjoyment. American Rivers believes a future of clean water and healthy rivers for everyone, everywhere is essential. Since 1973, we have protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers, and conserved clean water for people and nature. We are one of the most trusted and influential river conservation</p> | <p>2. Final Success</p> <p>Final success for the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River Campaign will be reached when 76 miles and 24,000 acres of riverside lands of the Upper Verde River, Granite Creek, and Sycamore Creek are protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the Comprehensive River Management Plan for these rivers is completed, protecting the paddling, hiking, hunting, fishing, rock climbing, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources of the area.</p> |
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organizations in the United States, delivering solutions for healthy and resilient rivers for people and nature. American Rivers has been working in the Southwest for over a decade.

Our Southwest River Protection Program works to protect the most ecologically and culturally important streams in the region by partnering with decision-makers, Tribes, local communities, scientists, and NGOs to implement a suite of creative tools to reach permanent protection.

3. Location Details

The Upper Verde River – extending from east of Paulden to the town of Clarkdale – is one of the cleanest, healthiest, most economically important, and culturally significant free-flowing rivers remaining in Arizona. The Upper Verde, along with its critical tributaries Granite Creek and Sycamore Creek, are the headwaters of the extraordinary Verde River which provides ~40% of Phoenix's surface water supply, has irreplaceable cultural significance to the Yavapai Apache Nation, and provides water for the recreational and agricultural economies of the Verde Valley. The watershed is essential habitat for 35 species of wildlife considered threatened, endangered, sensitive, or of concern.

Designating the approximately 76 combined river miles of the Upper Verde River, Granite Creek, and Sycamore Creek under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would ensure that the free-flowing character, water quality, and Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) of the Upper Verde River are conserved for people and wildlife [ORVs include: Culture (54 sites), Scenery, Native Fish (10 species), Wildlife (17 species), Recreation (12 listed types, including regionally important rock climbing, paddling, and backpacking), Geology, and Botany].

Maintaining and enhancing these values is vitally important to help to address biodiversity loss, climate change, aridification, and ever-increasing development in the region. In addition to its intrinsic natural and cultural values, what makes the Upper Verde special is its surrounding communities' depth of care and engagement in protecting the river.

The level of community support for the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River is unique and has significantly increased since we started our campaign. Supporters include the Yavapai Apache Nation; Arizona Governor, Katie Hobbs; Yavapai County Board of Supervisors; City of Prescott, City of Sedona, Town of Cottonwood; Town of Camp Verde; Town

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The goal of the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River Coalition is to earn Wild and Scenic designation for 76 miles and 24,000 acres of riverside lands of the Upper Verde River, including 44 miles of the mainstem of the Upper Verde River, 2 miles of Granite Creek, and 30 miles of Sycamore Creek. A secondary goal is to work together to see that the Comprehensive River Management Plan is completed. Our strategy focuses on building broad-based, non-partisan support through direct outreach to power-mapped individuals, groups, and corporate entities; hosting and sponsoring events to build awareness and motivate action such as well-attended film events and flyovers with our partners at Ecoflight; deployment of a suite of communications tools and tactics including a website (wildverderiver.org) and set of campaign assets, and engagement with all levels of decision-makers: local, state, and federal. Though some members of the coalition have been working on designating the Upper Verde for decades, the reinvigorated campaign coordinated by American Rivers really started in 2021.

Coalition Steering Committee Members:
 American Rivers
 American Whitewater
 Arizona Wildlife Federation
 Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
 Friends of the Verde River
 Natural History Institute
 Northern Arizona University Free-Flowing Rivers Lab
 Pew Charitable Trusts
 Prescott Climbers Coalition
 Prescott College
 Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter
 The Wilderness Society
 Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
 Verde River Adventures
 Wild Arizona
 Yavapai Apache Nation

Timeline/objectives have been roughly:

-Campaign Re-Start – 2021 (complete)
 Build steering committee

of Chino Valley; Town of Clarkdale; Town of Jerome; Town of Prescott Valley (i.e., all regional towns and surrounding governing bodies), 145 local businesses, including the Chambers of Commerce of Camp Verde, Chino Valley, Greater Cottonwood, Prescott Valley, and Jerome.

In March 2024, the Coalition asked for bill introduction and we were received warmly by Arizona's Congressional Delegation. Realistically, we'd like to see the bill introduced and passed in the 119th Congress, and we feel like we have a strategy to reach that goal.

Establish coordinator; set up meeting infrastructure
 Contractors and Interns for business outreach
 -Foundational Documents – 2022 (complete)
 Message Framework
 WSRA FAQ
 Support Letters Template
 One Pager
 -Outreach Plan: Build Public Support & Political Momentum with Priority Stakeholder Meetings and Letters of Support (2022 to present)
 Events and Outreach Meetings (ongoing)
 Logo/website (complete)
 Op Eds & LTEs (ongoing; most important starting Q2 2024)
 Host Wild Rivers Film Tour event at Elks Theater (complete)
 Host Wild Rivers Film Tour event at the Yavapai Apache Nation (complete)
 Host Ecoflights (complete)
 +Yavapai Apache Nation
 +AZ Congressional delegation staff and decision-makers
 -Participate in Prescott National Forest (PNF) Wild and Scenic Suitability Study (complete)
 Finding: Suitable, minus fish barrier sections
 Free-flow study contains useful info on impact to river habitat
 Future fish barrier questions (will come during EA)
 -Required Info for Congress: Proof of Central River Values (complete)
 Free-flowing
 Preliminary ORVs to qualify under WSRA (final ORVs set by PNF in CRMP)
 Water quality assessment
 Mileage and end points for classifications (complete for now)
 Provision for water rights (draft)
 Evidence of robust community support (exists at a high level; ongoing)
 Write UVWSR Draft Legislation
 +Initial Draft Summer 2023; then socialize/get feedback
 +Propose draft legislation to Senator Kelly, Senator Sinema, and Congressman Crane in March 2024
 -DC Visits, including constituents, Yavapai Apache Nation, and technical support staff – 2023, 2024, and beyond
 Meet with members of Congress to socialize idea in March 2023
 Meet with members of Congress to introduce draft legislation and ask for bill introduction in March 2024
 Subsequent meetings to work out language, introduction, and reintroduction when necessary (ongoing)
 -Phase 2 of Outreach – started April 2024
 Power-mapped support of influencers to AZ Delegation (complete)
 One-on-one meetings with potential opposition and high-value constituents including landowners, industry, public

utilities, etc. (ongoing)
 Steady stream of supportive letter, emails, phone calls, LTEs, and Op-Eds
 Action alerts
 Host events – films, vineyards, river trips, train rides, etc.
 DC visits with alternative messengers starting in 2025
 -Bill Introduction – 2025, 119th Congress
 Goal: bipartisan introduction in Congress and Senate
 Secure hearing and markup
 -Bill Passage – Goal of 119th Congress
 -Bill Reintroduction – as needed
 -After passage: Complete a Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP)
 PNF finalizes ORVs, boundaries, management plan w/ public participation
 Requires EIS
 Look to Fossil Creek CRMP as a case study

The economic impact is immense. The Verde is critical to AZ's water security, providing 40% of the surface water used by Phoenix. Protecting the headwaters is essential to ensuring downstream communities, agriculture, and the economies of the area continue to be able to rely on the river. In Yavapai County, 216,000 AZ residents participate in outdoor recreation on or along waterways, creating an annual economic impact of \$1 billion and generating 9,400 jobs (AZ Audubon Report, 2019). The Verde sustains 700+ jobs and \$100+ million in economic value in the rural Verde Valley (TNC, 2011), as well as numerous others upstream and downstream.

5. Key Decision Makers

The two decision makers we are working to influence are Representative Eli Crane (R-AZ) and Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ). Our strategy has been to build robust and bipartisan support across all local levels of government and within the business community, and we've been very successful, having secured support as noted above in detail. We've interacted with both Rep. Crane and Sen. Kelly's offices in D.C. twice ('23 and '24) and at this point have consistent communication with their environmentally-focused legislative staff and local/district staff. Our approach to these interactions centers the high level of constituent support for the designation, the general lack of opposition, and the leadership of the Yavapai Apache Nation in the campaign.

6. Elevate Voices

The Yavapai Apache Nation (YAN) is a founding member and active participant in the coalition. Nancy Ruiz (previous Environmental Manager for the Nation and now Executive Assistant to the Council Chair and Vicechair) participates in the steering committee. Both Nancy and Chairwoman Tanya Lewis went to Washington, D.C. in 2023 and 2024 with the coalition to advocate for the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic designation. YAN's tribal council, cultural office, and environmental office have all engaged in the development of the draft legislation.

We have also reached out to the other tribes in the region, including Yavapai Prescott Indian Tribe, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, and Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community; we're in ongoing conversations with them as they determine to what degree they are able to engage in the coalition. Representatives from YAN and Yavapai Prescott Indian Tribe both participated in overflights of the river with EcoFlight in the fall of '23. We hosted a Wild Rivers Film Tour at YAN in April '24.

Beyond this, in terms of grassroots support/action, we have over local 600 individuals and 150+ local businesses who have signed letters of support.

7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

Outcomes that we hope to accomplish over the next year, and can reasonably expect to succeed at include:

1. Introduction of the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River Act in either the House or the Senate
2. Hearing scheduled or planned in either the House Natural Resources Committee or Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
3. Endorsement, or statement (formal or informal) of non-opposition, from key energy and utility companies in the region
4. Increasing the number of business supporters of the coalition by 20

8. Evaluate Your Progress

We will evaluate our progress and success through quarterly reviews by the steering committee against the time-sensitive goals, objectives, and outcomes listed in the three sections immediately above this one.

9. TCA Funding Plan

We plan to use funding from The Conservation Alliance to support two American Rivers staff members, Mike Fiebig and Rachel Ellis. Rachel is the coordinator of the coalition, and Mike is the primary political strategist. We will also use funding for professional services including communications support, business outreach support, event planning, and the design and printing of materials and communications assets. Finally, we will use this funding for travel to accomplish campaign goals.

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

American Rivers is deeply invested in DEI, as it is one of our core values of our organization. DEI-related objectives are woven throughout our FY23-26 strategic plan. We strive to incorporate diverse voices, equity, inclusiveness and justice into all of our work, as we believe that all communities deserve access to water and healthy rivers.

American Rivers continues to focus on hiring, retention, and mentorship efforts of our staff, and now host a variety of Committees, Affinity, and Resource Groups. We recently completed Green 2.0's 2023 Transparency Card, and recognize that there has been a stagnation on progress with regard to diversity for board and staff this past year across the sector that are also reflected in our demographics for this year. We are working on solutions to the barriers we have identified, including additional training, mentorship, and workgroups on retention priorities like compensation/benefits and pace and change at work.

11. Confidential Items

Our strategy and timeline above contain sensitive information about outreach to members of Congress and businesses. Please do not distribute it. Thank you!

Other Relevant Application Details