



Preserving New Mexico's Last Free-Flowing River



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

New Mexico Wild is a 501(c)(3) grassroots organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and continued enjoyment of New Mexico's wildlands and Wilderness areas. We are committed to raising public awareness of issues affecting New Mexico's public lands and fostering future stewards. We engage with and amplify the voices of

JEDI Efforts and Impact

New Mexico is famous for its cultural diversity and our activities reflect this. We work with non-profit partners, Hispanic stakeholders from New Mexico villages, land-grantees, and Native American tribes to ensure their values and traditions are respected and preserved. For example, this year we have helped underwrite numerous trips

communities that are part of the rich cultural heritage of New Mexico, and we build relationships with new partners for protecting New Mexico's lands, waters, and wildlife.

New Mexico Wild has been leading and facilitating land protection campaigns for over 25 years and our seasoned, culturally diverse, of-community staff and contractor network encompasses decades of experience, knowledge, and success. We are known for combining specialized community organizing with a deep knowledge of cultural and ecological preservation and long standing relationships with elected leaders at all levels. Each year we engage hundreds of volunteers in service on public lands.

Final Success

Wild and Scenic River designation for 446 miles of river segments permanently protecting the Gila River and tributaries to keep New Mexico's last free flowing river healthy and thriving in the face of water scarcity, development pressures, climate change, persistent dam and diversion projects, and other threats.

Location Details

to DC for Tribal representatives and have provided grant funding to local organizations to increase their capacity to meaningfully engage. We work to ensure the historic connection between communities and landscapes remains intact and people will have access to traditional uses.

A broader demonstration of our commitment to DEI is our relationship with Native Land Institute (NLI). We helped form the first Indigenous-run NLI, which works to increase the capacity of Native voices to engage and help lead on conservation and related policy issues affecting Native people. We currently serve as NLI's fiscal sponsor as they await their tax exempt status.

The Gila River is the lifeblood of New Mexico: the last free-flowing river that contains an abundance and diversity of fish and wildlife unparalleled anywhere in the state. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded along the river where streamside habitat supports wildlife ranging from the reclusive mountain lion and endangered Lobo to the threatened loach minnow. It is home to numerous other threatened and endangered species including the Gila trout, Chiricahua leopard frog, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Mexican spotted owl.

The greater Gila area is unmatched for outdoor recreational opportunities like hiking, backpacking, horse packing, rafting and kayaking, hunting, fishing and mountain biking/bike packing. The Gila is also a witness to the history of New Mexico: its canyons, cliffs and cottonwood groves are home to historic Native American and early pioneer sites. The Gila Wilderness, where the Gila River originates, was the very first wilderness area designated in America in 1924.

The greater Gila region also harbors exceptional climate adaptation potential due to its topographical relief, location at the confluence of different ecosystem types, existing land protections, and free-flowing (yet unprotected) rivers and streams. Specifically, this area currently retains a high degree of biodiversity, habitat quality, habitat connectivity, and carbon sequestration potential, which with a heightened level of protection for critical rivers and streams can continue to support diverse fish, wildlife, and plant populations along with outdoor recreation opportunities and critical ecosystem services such as clean, reliable drinking water for down stream communities in the long-term in spite of a rapidly warming climate.

However, the river faces chronic pressures from dams, river diversion, mining, and development projects. Additionally, under the current administration, the Gila National Forest's top management priorities include increasing logging and grazing. We need to use New Mexico's natural resources wisely in ways that conserve our rivers, retain ecosystem processes, and respect our traditions. The best way to do that is by supporting the campaign to designate the Gila as a Wild and Scenic River, which will keep New Mexico's last free-flowing river healthy and thriving in the face of water scarcity, development pressures, climate change, and other threats. Once we lose the Gila, there is no getting it back.

Biodiversity in Project Area

The designation of the Gila as Wild and Scenic would positively impact both climate resiliency and biodiversity. For climate resiliency, designation would preserve the free-flowing nature of the Gila, which supports groundwater recharge and increases resilience to drought. Additionally, Healthy, intact riparian zones provide natural cooling, stabilize riverbanks, and create microclimates that mitigate temperature extremes, benefiting both wildlife and local communities. As mentioned above, the Gila area has among the highest climate adaptation potential of any public lands in New Mexico. By protecting critical riparian habitats and ecological processes, Wild and Scenic designation would play a key role in allowing species and human communities – including recreationists – to adapt to and thrive in a warming climate.

In addition to safeguarding climate resiliency and adaptation values, Wild and Scenic designation would also strongly benefit biodiversity through protection of habitat and habitat linkages. The Gila River is home to several threatened and endangered species, including the Gila trout, Chiricahua leopard frog, and southwestern willow flycatcher. It is impossible to understate how critical riparian areas in New Mexico are to species and biodiversity. Designation would prevent habitat degradation and fragmentation of this essential habitat type in our nation's first Wilderness area and surrounding public lands. Furthermore, given the exceptional habitat value of riparian areas in the Southwest, Wild and Scenic designation would protect critical habitat linkages far beyond the Gila Wilderness, including protecting connectivity and wildlife corridors to other wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, wildlife management areas, inventoried roadless areas, and other protected areas in the

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Wild and Scenic designation for the Gila River would almost certainly result in an increase in outdoor recreation and economic activity in the Gila region. For one, designation would protect the free-flowing Gila and allow for continued recreational activities such as kayaking, canoeing, packrafting, rafting fishing, hunting, hiking, backpacking, and wildlife watching. The sustained economic benefits of a Wild and Scenic Gila River are important in diversifying the economy in southwest New Mexico, which is home to communities that are underserved and lacking in economic opportunity, to include a more robust tourism and outdoor recreation economy. Increased outdoor recreation would create more jobs for New Mexicans, connect them to their heritage, contribute to solving disparities in health and outdoor access, and diversify and strengthen local economies.

Additionally, in 2020, Southwick Associates, an economics firm specializing in outdoor recreation markets, conducted a study to estimate the economic contributions associated with water-related outdoor recreation in the Gila River and the San Francisco River watersheds. Water related outdoor recreation in New Mexico's Gila River and San Francisco River watersheds stimulates economic activity that supports at least 3,900 jobs in New Mexico, providing \$92.4 million of income. Assuming a direct relationship between days of use and spending by river users, Southwick Associates estimates the recreation spending by users of the river could increase to \$386.3 million and result in as many as 3,597 more recreation-related jobs with Wild and Scenic designation. Their findings strongly suggest that protecting these rivers as Wild and Scenic would serve as a marketing tool that would increase the economic impact and

Gila region in New Mexico as well as Arizona, including the Gila Box National Riparian Conservation Area and the Blue Range Primitive Area.

**Strategy & Timeline
For Final Success**

New Mexico Wild conceived of and has led the Gila Wild and Scenic campaign and coalition from the start. Working closely with communities, tribes, key local collaborators, and the federal congressional delegation, we will work to continue to build support and advance permanent protection through Wild and Scenic River designation for the Gila River to safeguard biodiversity, address climate concerns, and keep the greater Gila a destination for outdoor recreation, a critical part of New Mexico's economy.

This effort will be built on long-standing access and relationships. We will work to educate elected officials on the importance of Wild and Scenic designation. New Mexico's federal delegation has already introduced/reintroduced the M.H Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act in 116th, 117th, and 118th Congresses, where it passed through senate committee with bi-partisan support. New Mexico Wild will advocate for reintroduction of this bill in the new Congress. We will continue to assemble, support, and sustain broad stakeholders into effective coalitions, paying particular attention to raising up local voices. Current key partners include American Rivers, American Whitewater, the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe, Gila Conservation Coalition, and the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. In addition to these key partners, through grassroots organizing we've earned the support of over 120 local businesses, governments and tribes, communities of faith, civic organizations, sportsman organizations, and conservation organizations, including Grant County, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, Vet Voice Foundation, Backcountry Horsemen of New Mexico, and Great Old Broads for Wilderness among many others.

We will continue raise public awareness; forge broad coalitions; and build and mobilize a groundswell of support for a Wild and Scenic Gila River through our grassroots organizing, leadership of the Gila Wild and Scenic coalition, and strong relationships with New Mexico's congressional delegation and local elected officials. New Mexico Wild has been working in the Greater Gila region and throughout the state for the past 25 years to lay the groundwork for protection of the water, wildlife, and wilderness of the Gila. Our deep ties to communities are critical when demonstrating local support and we

contributions of outdoor recreation to a more diversified and sustainable economy.

Key Decision Makers

New Mexico Wild enjoys long-standing relationships with all members of the New Mexico Federal delegation who unanimously co-sponsored the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act, and whom we will work with for bill reintroduction. To continue to demonstrate overwhelming community support, New Mexico Wild will continue to engage and expand a widely diverse set of community stakeholders. We will work to gain/sustain support from additional Tribes (already supported by all the Pueblos and the Fort Sill Apache Chiricahua Warm Springs Tribe) as well as local elected officials at the city and county level. This effort will be built on long-standing access and relationships. All members of the current federal delegation have a pro-conservation orientation, and we have a track record of successfully working with them to protect public lands.

Business support is critical to our success, and New Mexico Wild has been engaging with the business community for over a decade to help advance Gila Wild and Scenic designation and we plan to continue to broaden that engagement. Support from local business leaders and small business owners shows key decision makers the importance of the Gila and outdoor recreation to the local economy. We have a partnership with Open Space Brewing in Santa Clara, New Mexico and often co-host events with them that support the Gila. We currently have the support of businesses and business groups across New Mexico and beyond including the Southwest New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, The Black Range Lodge, Silver City Main Street Project, Jacks Plastic Welding Inc., and Red River Angler and Sport and over 100 other area businesses.

remain committed to the proven community driven model of conservation as the best way to secure significant and durable protection. We will educate the public about the importance of the Gila and the benefits of Wild and Scenic designation through our communications as well as stewardship and outreach events with an emphasis on engaging historically marginalized and underserved communities in outreach and other events to continue to broaden our support base. We will also work with our partners and collaborate with diverse set of community stakeholders to garner support to keep New Mexico's last undammed river healthy and thriving in the face of water scarcity, development pressures, climate change, and other threats.

Working closely with our federal elected officials, we will advocate that Gila Wild and Scenic legislation is reintroduced in both the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate in the first half of 2025. Based on the strong foundation of support that we have built for this legislation in greater Gila area communities and continued our organizing and engagement efforts this legislation will be as well posed as ever to pass should a bipartisan public lands package come together in this Congress.

Elevate Voices

Engaging with and mobilizing local communities is vital to our land and water protection strategy; we connect unconventional allies to create a diverse coalition and work with them towards our common goals, elevating their voices in the process. Many communities around the Gila are rural and low-income, with a large Hispanic and Latino population. We make efforts to hire staff of and from community. We have provided resources and supported, for example, mural projects for at risk area youth; field trips and outings for area youth; and hired independent contractors from these communities for targeted outreach for BIPOC communities. This past summer, we successfully advocated/insisted that Tribal leadership had a formal role in the 100th anniversary celebration of the Gila Wilderness, organized by the Forest Service. Additionally, within the last year, an Air Force proposal to expand military overflight training over the Gila Wilderness presented an opportunity to identify common ground and work toward a common cause with what have traditionally been opponents of wild and scenic river legislation, including elected officials in Catron and Hidalgo Counties, as well as other community leaders affiliated with ranching interests.

We've also proactively engaged with Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Grasstops/Grassroots Outreach - We will continue to engage with community leaders to sustain and grow support for Gila Wild and Scenic, including broadening our outreach and organizing activities in Catron County and in the Mining District, with the result of obtaining one or more new resolutions of support for Gila Wild and Scenic protections from these communities/local governing bodies.
- Communications- Maintain media strategy including social media, member communications, mailings, updating wildgilariver.org, and our biannual print newsletter (40,000 copies per issue); as well as pitch article ideas to relevant press when necessary to raise awareness, grow support for Gila Wild and Scenic, and increase public engagement.
- Outings and Stewardship- hold at least 10 local events and outings to foster community awareness and stewardship of the Gila River and build supporters with the business community, including with youth and residents of underserved communities.



Tribe (who consider the Gila their ancestral homeland before forcible removal) and the All Pueblo Council of Governors, which consists of the twenty Pueblos now within New Mexico. For example, we routinely take delegations from New Mexico to Washington, DC with Tribes and Pueblos to assist them in voicing their support by meeting with elected officials and administration officials. We have also been integral in developing and incubating Native Land Institute (NLI), a Tribally-led organization focused on increasing Tribal leadership in conservation, and will continue to work closely with NLI to explore engagement of other Tribes that may have ties to the Gila area.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support will be instrumental in advancing the campaign to secure Wild and Scenic River designation for the Gila River. Funding will enable New Mexico Wild to expand outreach, strengthen coalition-building efforts, and engage key stakeholders, including local communities and historically marginalized groups, Tribal nations, and elected officials. With TCA's support, we will increase our grassroots advocacy, enhance communications initiatives, and build momentum for the reintroduction and advancement of the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act in Congress. By helping us to increase our momentum in community building and communications efforts, this investment will help solidify New Mexico Wild's leadership in obtaining long-term protections for New Mexico's last free-flowing river, ensuring its ecological integrity and continued contributions to biodiversity, climate resilience, and outdoor recreation.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

None.

Other Relevant Application Details

