



Gila Wild & Scenic Designation



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project (NTCP) works to ensure historically and deliberately excluded communities have access to the outdoors and their history, values, and people are authentically

JEDI Efforts and Impact

NTCP was founded to address systemic injustices, find solutions, and rewrite the way outdoor spaces are managed—ensuring full participation, leadership, and empowerment of historically

reflected in public land and water management decisions. The organization was founded in 2017 by a group of friends from Las Cruces, NM who wanted to address the lack of opportunities for Latino people to explore the outdoors. Since acquiring non-profit status in 2019, we've launched a plethora of successful state and national campaigns like the New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund, the Outdoor Opportunity Initiative, the 30x30 and Justice 40 initiatives led by the Biden-Harris presidency, and the addition of two national monuments in partnership with the Monumental Shift Coalition.

overlooked communities. We're proud to work alongside leaders and elected officials to protect outdoor spaces while centering the voices closest to the land. In the past year, we've: Facilitated meetings with Administration officials and stakeholders through the America the Beautiful for All coalition, representing 240+ organizations fighting to protect 30% of U.S. lands and waters while securing 40% of investments for frontline communities; Hosted the White House Council on Environmental Quality in Albuquerque, ensuring historically marginalized leaders were at the head of the table; Organized community events to mobilize action on Rio Grande and Gila River issues; Convened Outdoor Opportunity Coalition leaders weekly to ensure place-based advocates drive the creation of a national outdoor equity fund.

Final Success

Success for this project involves securing Wild & Scenic designation for 436 miles of the Gila River by amplifying the voices of Hispanic, Tribal, and Pueblo communities, gaining legislative support through targeted advocacy, and celebrating the Gila River with community initiatives and storytelling that highlight its cultural and ecological significance.

Location Details

The Gila, the nation's first congressionally designated Wilderness and New Mexico's last free-flowing river, remains the largest Wilderness Area in the state. Yet, out of New Mexico's 108,014 miles of river, only 124 miles are permanently protected as Wild & Scenic. It's crucial for the local wildlife, including endangered species like the Gila trout and southwestern willow flycatcher. The river also has deep cultural roots, having supported Indigenous communities like the Mimbres and Gila Apache for centuries.

However, the river faces serious threats from climate change, drought, and proposed water diversions that could harm its natural flow and biodiversity. Protecting the Gila River is vital for preserving wildlife, supporting local communities, and maintaining a healthy environment. Efforts are focused on preventing harmful development and ensuring this important river remains a natural treasure for future generations.

Biodiversity in Project Area

The latest conservation science tells us that connectivity at scale is key to ensuring the lands and wild places we love have the space they need to adapt to a rapidly changing climate. The Greater Gila exemplifies a vastness that grows increasingly uncommon in this age of fractured geographies. We must protect an entire intact cultural landscape while scaling connectivity and reorienting federal agencies to be relevant to the challenges of 21st century land management like smart renewable energy development and diverse recreational usage. NTCP is advocating for the protection of the Gila River through the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act. Your support for this bill will help preserve the last free flowing river of the Southwest, a

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Protecting the Gila River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would greatly benefit New Mexico's economy, outdoor recreation, and natural beauty. Outdoor activities like fishing, hiking, hunting, camping, and rafting not only provide enjoyment but also support nearly 99,000 jobs and generate over \$623 million in state and local tax revenue annually. Keeping the Gila free-flowing ensures these opportunities remain available for future generations.

Designating the Gila as a Wild and Scenic River would open up more outdoor recreation opportunities for the local community, boosting tourism and supporting small businesses. With better recognition and protection, the area could attract more investment in eco-

pristine natural resource for future generations and promote the outdoor economy, biodiversity, and responsible stewardship of our natural resources.

tourism, such as guided rafting trips, birdwatching tours, and services for hikers, hunters, and anglers. Local businesses like gear shops, campgrounds, and restaurants could see more visitors attracted to the Gila's breathtaking landscapes and diverse wildlife. Plus, improved trail maintenance and river access points would make the area more accessible for families, casual adventurers, and seasoned outdoor enthusiasts alike. With natural hot springs along the way, it's the perfect place to connect with nature and relax. This designation would help create a sustainable recreation-based economy while preserving the wild character that makes the Gila such a unique and treasured destination.

This designation won't take away access or change existing water rights. Farmers, ranchers, and local communities that rely on the river can continue using it as they always have. It simply means the Gila will remain free-flowing, wild, and full of life. Thanks to efforts led by New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich and Congressman Gabe Vasquez, we can protect this special place forever, preserving outdoor traditions, supporting local businesses, and ensuring future generations experience the Gila River's beauty and adventure.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

NTCP has a focused strategy to secure Wild & Scenic designation for the Gila River, and will play a central role in organizing and facilitating all aspects of this project, from federal advocacy to grassroots mobilization and coalition-building. We will continue engaging with local communities, gathering their input, and ensuring their voices are heard in the legislative process. Our team will also lead the development and distribution of educational materials, manage digital campaigns, and organize public events that bring together stakeholders from all sectors. Our goal is to protect 436 miles of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, ensuring long-term preservation of their cultural, ecological, and economic value.

Strategy:

1. Federal Advocacy & Legislative Support:

NTCP is working to pass the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. With Congressman Gabe Vasquez reintroducing the bill in the House, we aim to help move it through committee. In the Senate, we will collaborate with Senator Heinrich to reintroduce the bill, advance it through committee, and secure its final passage. NTCP will continue to build support through meetings, briefings, and community engagement efforts until the M.H. Dutch Salmon Wild and Scenic

Key Decision Makers

Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project (NTCP) is working to secure Wild & Scenic designation for the Gila River by engaging key decision-makers at both the federal and local levels. Our primary targets are Congressman Gabe Vasquez and Senator Martin Heinrich to reintroduce in both chambers of the congress. With continued cultivation of the leadership of Congressman Vasquez in the House and Senator Heinrich's backing in the Senate, we have a solid foundation to move the bill through committee and build broader legislative support.

Our approach includes direct engagement with legislators through congressional briefings, D.C. fly-ins, and local advocacy efforts in Grant County to demonstrate widespread support. We ensure that historically underrepresented Hispanic, Tribal, and Pueblo communities are at the forefront of these conversations by organizing events like the Gila River Legacy Gathering and Community, Cultura y Conservación. These initiatives create opportunities for community members to share their perspectives with policymakers, reinforcing the cultural and economic importance of protecting the Gila. We are also working with partners like Flickr, Native Outdoors, Continental Divide Trail Coalition, and the National Religious

Rivers Act is signed into law.

2. Grassroots Mobilization & Community Engagement:

We will organize community events such as recreation opportunities with targeted local and federal elected officials, conservation workshops, and cultural gatherings to raise awareness and ensure local voices are heard. These efforts will help bridge the gap between community needs and decision-makers' priorities, fostering deeper connections to the Gila River.

3. Coalition Building & Strategic

Partnerships:

NTCP will strengthen partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and conservation groups, including NM Wild, Native Outdoors, and businesses like Little Toad Creek Distillery and FlikR. We will leverage these relationships to build broad support for the Gila River's protection.

Timeline:

Phase 1 – House (Months 1-4):

Focus on passing the bill in the House through fly-ins, briefings, and local engagement. With Congressman Vasquez already committed to introducing the bill in the House of Representatives, NTCP has supported this effort by organizing meetings, fly-ins, and congressional briefings to secure broad support for the bill. In the coming weeks, we aim to secure a successful introduction and passage of the bill in the House, laying the groundwork for Senate action.

Phase 2 – Senate (Months 5-9):

Shift focus to moving the bill through the Senate, with additional grassroots support. We are working closely with Senator Heinrich, who already supports the bill, to move it through the Senate. Our focus will be to build stronger backing for the bill in the Senate, ensuring that it is included in the larger public lands package and moves through the Senate committee process. This phase will require continued engagement with legislators, as well as coordination with other stakeholders to maintain momentum.

Phase 3 – Post-Passage (Months 10-12):

Celebrate success with public events and ensure continued protection of the Gila. Once the bill passes both the House and Senate, we will focus on public celebrations and events, such as river floats, that bring together the local community and decision-makers to mark the success and highlight the river's significance.

Alternate Phase 3

Continue to use existing and adapted

Partnership for the Environment to continue building community support.

Additionally, local businesses in Grant County, such as Little Toad Creek Distillery and Open Space Brewery, have been vocal advocates for Gila River protection and have previously hosted community activation events. Their engagement highlights the economic benefits of protecting the Gila for outdoor recreation and tourism. Our continued visual storytelling efforts (in both video and photography formats) present a great opportunity for partnerships with outdoor brands to showcase their support of the Gila River Wild & Scenic designation. Support from local and national businesses will continue to strengthen the case for permanent federal protection of the Gila River.

strategies to build grassroots and legislative support for the ultimate passage of the bill.

Objectives:

Organize three community events to mobilize local support and engagement.

Build coalition support from 10 local organizations and businesses.

Distribute targeted educational materials and raise awareness about the Gila River.

Ensure local voices are able to advocate for the proper protection of the Gila in Washington, DC, creating the support for our federal champions to drive the bill forward.

Ultimate Goal:

Secure Wild & Scenic designation for 436 miles of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers.

With TCA's support, NTCP will advance our efforts to protect the Gila River, engaging local community members, policymakers, and stakeholders to ensure lasting protection.

Elevate Voices

NTCP is committed to ensuring historically underrepresented communities—Hispanic, Tribal, and Pueblo groups—are central to efforts to protect the Gila River. Through advocacy, grassroots organizing, and community-driven initiatives, we mobilize local voices to shape conservation policies that honor their deep cultural and historical connections to the land. We create opportunities for these communities to engage directly with decision-makers through D.C. fly-ins, congressional briefings, and local advocacy in Grant County. With Congressman Gabe Vasquez set to introduce the Gila bill in the House, NTCP has been asked to host an activation event to build momentum. As we shift to phase two—securing Senate backing from Senator Heinrich—this introduction strengthens our case by highlighting the groundwork we've already done. On the ground, NTCP fosters awareness through community gatherings, educational workshops, and cultural events like the Gila River Legacy Gathering and *Community, Cultura y Conservación.* These events unite local voices, conservation groups, and policymakers to discuss the Gila's future. Through river floats, conservation education, and digital storytelling, we amplify personal narratives that showcase the deep ties these communities have to the river. As a founding member of the *America the Beautiful for All* coalition, NTCP elevates local voices and works with partners to include the Gila Wild and Scenic Act in the 2025 public lands package. We also engage community members through the Outdoor Opportunity Coalition, fostering

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

Over the next year, Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project (NTCP) aims to achieve the following outcomes: Stronger legislative support to secure Wild & Scenic designation for 436 miles of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, with successful introduction and passage of the bill in both the House and Senate to ensure the river's long-term protection. Greater engagement from Hispanic, Tribal, and Pueblo communities in decision-making processes related to conservation and land management. Strengthened partnerships between local businesses, conservation groups, coalitions, and policymakers to support the Gila River's protection. Increased public awareness of the Gila River's cultural and ecological importance, reflected in increased media coverage, public outreach, and participation in related events.

These outcomes focus on tangible results like community support, legislative action, and increased collaboration.

connections to conservation through storytelling and local events—such as a brewery gathering for our Gila River video. Collaborating with New Mexico Wild, NTCP will focus on federal advocacy while New Mexico Wild engages locally, ensuring grassroots and legislative efforts remain aligned. Together, we will bridge local advocacy with federal action to protect the Gila River for generations to come.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support is vital to NTCP's work in securing Wild & Scenic designation for the Gila River. With your funding, we can continue organizing information sessions, congressional briefings, and meetings with decision-makers and community leaders to highlight the Gila's cultural, ecological, and economic importance, building strong support for its protection. Your support will also help expand community engagement through river floats and conservation workshops, giving local residents a platform to voice their concerns and connect with the cause. These efforts will bridge the gap between community needs and policy goals, strengthening ties between residents and the Gila River. Finally, TCA's backing will allow us to develop and share educational materials—brochures, fact sheets, and videos featuring Latino and Indigenous voices—to inform both the public and decision-makers about the Gila's significance and the urgent need to protect it.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

N/A

Other Relevant Application Details

