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Preserving New Mexico's Last Free-Flowing River

Applying Organization	New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (New Mexico Wild)	Application Date	5/12/2026
Applying Contact	Mollie Fullerton	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Mollie Fullerton, 5/12/2026, 3:33 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Preserving New Mexico's Last Free-Flowing River	Requested Amount	\$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Preserving New Mexico's Last Free-Flowing River		
Type of Project	Designation; Defense	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	NM	Longitude	-108.20227503831626
Latitude	33.17887864780397		

Organization Details

Organization Name	New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (New Mexico Wild)	Primary address for organization	
Contact Name	Mollie Fullerton	Contact Title	Grants Manager
Contact Email Address	mollie@nmwild.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$3,507,285.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	29	Main Phone	505-843-8696
Total Membership	5,135	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://nmwild.org/
BIPOC-led	No	C-Suite Staff	

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	New Mexico Wild is a 501(c)(3) grassroots organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and continued	Location Details	The Gila River is the lifeblood of New Mexico: the last free-flowing river that contains an abundance and diversity of
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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 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.

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: it's home to historic Native American and early pioneer sites. The Gila Wilderness was the 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 relentless threats from proposed dams, river diversion, mining, and development projects. Under the current administration, the Gila faces additional threats including recent proposals like the rescission of the Roadless Rule. We need to use New Mexico's natural resources wisely to 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.

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,

Impact on Climate and Biodiversity

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

climate change, persistent dam and diversion projects, and other threats.

recharge and increases resilience to drought, including an ongoing ability for the river to provide downstream communities with clean, reliable water for municipal and agricultural uses. 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 downstream on 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 Gila region in New Mexico as well as Arizona, including the Gila Box National Riparian Conservation Area and the Blue Range Primitive Area.

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 by highlighting the river's outstanding recreational, ecological, and social values. Designation would also 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

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. Due to widespread public support across the Gila region as well as the state of New Mexico for permanently protecting the Gila River coupled with our commitment to ongoing organizing work

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. As mentioned above, their findings suggest that protecting these rivers as Wild and Scenic would serve as a marketing tool that would increase the economic impact and contributions of outdoor recreation to a more diversified and sustainable economy.

to permanently protect the Gila, a Gila Wild and Scenic River designation is a matter of "when," not "if."

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 the Senate in the 116th, 117th, 118th, and 119th Congresses, where it has now passed through the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources twice with bi-partisan support. The legislation has also been introduced in the House in the 118th and 119th Congresses.

We will continue to assemble, grow, and sustain broad-based community supporters to leverage ongoing coalition work, paying particular attention to raising up local voices. Current key partners include the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe; local organizations like the Gila Conservation Coalition, Heart of the Gila, Gila Resources Information Project, and Upper Gila Watershed Alliance; the statewide New Mexico Wildlife Federation; and national organizations including American Rivers, American Whitewater, Trout Unlimited, Center for Biological Diversity, and Conservation Lands Foundation. In addition to these key partners, through grassroots organizing we've earned and continue to work to grow 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 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 base of support. 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.

If current political trends hold and the House and/or Senate flip to Democratic majority we will work closely with our delegation to advance the Gila legislation in the House and/or Senate as political opportunities become available. Additionally, we will leverage relationships nationally and work with national conservation partners to advocate for a public lands package and to ensure that the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act is a high priority for such a package, should one materialize.

We have robust local business support that we have spent that we have recently been refreshing by revisiting our support book that contains letters from local businesses, organizations, and leaders. While local business support is vital to Gila Wild and Scenic designation, getting access to national businesses who would like to express their support could help our efforts by providing support letters and/or publicizing the fight to protect the Gila to raise broader national awareness about this extraordinary river system.

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 movement on the bill. 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

Working With Business Community

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.

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 surrounding 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.

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

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Outreach - Continue to engage with community leaders to sustain and grow support, including broadening our outreach/organizing in Catron County and the Mining District, to obtain 1+ new resolutions of support. This is critical in the context of ongoing churn of elected officials at the local level and within the state legislature to ensure that we retain/grow support from local and state political bodies.
- Communications- Maintain media strategy including social media, member communications, wildgilariver.org, and biannual print newsletter. Pitch article ideas to press to grow support. Host events like film screenings in New Mexico and beyond to raise awareness (targeting 5+ screenings of Journey Down the Gila in southern New Mexico, West Texas, and southern Arizona in 2027).
- Outings - hold 10+ local events and outings to foster community awareness and stewardship of the Gila River and build supporters with the business community, youth, and residents of underserved communities.

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 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.

Confidential Items

n/a

