



The M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act

The Gila headwaters, including the San Francisco River and its main tributaries, comprise the largest remaining network of naturally free-flowing river segments in the Southwestern United States. The Gila and San Francisco Rivers also sit in the heart of the Gila Wilderness, established by the Forest Service in 1924 as the world's first wilderness area and the largest wilderness area in New Mexico. We are developing legislation to protect portions of the Gila and its tributaries under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Designating the Gila River as a Wild and Scenic River 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. Designation will preserve exceptional experiences for families to cherish, spectacular scenery and wildlife habitat, abundant cultural resources, the integrity of an important water source, and traditional uses.

We developed the draft text in response to the large amount of feedback provided by stakeholders to date. Because many farms, ranches, conservation districts, and local communities rely on this river, we are including a number of provisions to make clear what this bill does and does not do, such as the following:

- 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 for continued traditional uses such as grazing and irrigating.
- 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.
- 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 not** condemn private 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** limit public access to public lands, nor does it open up private lands to public access.
- This Act **will not** affect grazing permits, including for currently vacant allotments on federal land.
- This Act **will not** have any effect on existing valid water rights, interstate water compacts, or existing irrigation or water delivery operations.

Next Steps

We are sharing initial draft bill text with community stakeholders and asking for your comments. We will also be releasing draft maps and text more broadly for public comment early next year. Once the proposal is refined in response to feedback from the community, we will introduce Gila Wild and Scenic River legislation.

For any comments, please email gilacommentstomudall.senate.gov or send written information to Gila Comments, Office of U.S. Senator Tom Udall, 201 N. Church Street, Suite 201B, Las Cruces, NM 88001.