

Wild Gila River Bill highlights proposed protections

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SILVER CITY, N.M. —The Wild Gila River Coalition released a StoryMap Aug. 10 to help visually explore some of the river segments that would be preserved for future generations by legislation introduced by Senators Tom Udall, D-N.M. and Martin Heinrich, D-N.M.

The StoryMap takes viewers to the center of the proposal, the Gila Wilderness, which was an inspiration for one of our country's bedrock conservation laws, the Wilderness Act of 1964. From there, the map identifies rivers as "wild," "scenic," and "recreational," while meandering through the mountains and canyons of this iconic Southwestern landscape, introducing the viewer to places like the Mogollon Box and the Lower San Francisco River Canyon.

"Being able to show people what this bill will conserve is critical," Brad Schuster, member of the Gila/Rio Grande Trout Unlimited chapter said. "I have been going to the Gila River for the last 19 years, and allowing people who are not able to come here now to explore through this interactive map is really special."

The StoryMap reads, "A community-led proposal has led to legislation being introduced that would protect more than 440 miles of these waterways as Wild and Scenic Rivers. The M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act will sustain the local, rural economies that depend upon time-tested traditions like grazing, ranching, and hunting and fishing, in addition to boosting the growing outdoor recreation economy."

At a time when New Mexicans are experiencing real economic hardships from the pandemic, designating these rivers and tributaries as Wild and Scenic will ensure local, rural economies that depend upon time-tested traditions like grazing, ranching, and hunting and fishing can continue.

Also viewing the value of the rivers as helpful to the economy is Sam Aliban. Aliban, who owns the Javalina Coffee House says his business depends upon the Gila and San Francisco Rivers and their tributaries running free.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us how critical our protected lands and waters are to rural communities. Now is the time to create a lasting legacy for our state and protect the Wild Gila

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River.”

This legislation is designed to protect the future of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers.

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