



Hearing on Bills Intended to Increase the Role of Tribes in Public Land Management

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PHOENIX, Ariz. — On September 14, the United States House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee's National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee held a hearing to examine three bills introduced earlier this Congress that will advance additional opportunities for Tribal co-management and resource protection:

- [H.R. 8108](#), the *Advancing Tribal Parity on Public Land Act* (fact sheet [here](#))
- [H.R. 8109](#), the *Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act* (fact sheet [here](#))
- [H.R. 8719](#), the *Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act* (fact sheet [here](#))

These three bills recognize the cultural significance and intrinsic value that public lands hold for Indigenous Peoples and specific Native American Tribes and establish new ways for Tribes to participate in the stewardship and management of those lands.

Specifically, the [Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act](#) seeks to protect the [Great Bend of the Gila](#) — a river valley and surrounding desert region between Phoenix and Yuma, Arizona. Tribes, local communities, businesses, recreationalists, conservationists, and heritage preservationists celebrated the bill's introduction and have been working for greater permanent protections for this region for decades. Much of the Southwest's history, heritage, and natural and geological values are exemplified in the Great Bend of the Gila. Shaped by natural forces over millions of years, this volcanic landscape is part of the Sonoran Desert, which ranks first in biodiversity among the deserts of North America. The region serves as a critically important

travel corridor for animals such as bighorn sheep, Sonoran desert tortoise, mule deer, Le Conte's thrasher, javelina, and the endangered Sonoran pronghorn.

H.R. 8719 acknowledges the importance of the cultural, historical, spiritual, and ancestral ties that at least 13 federally recognized Tribal nations maintain to the region and establishes a process for management consultation through the creation of a Tribal commission. Further, the National Conservation Areas and Wilderness Areas created by H.R. 8719 are essential to assuring that iconic Sonoran Desert wildlife and plant species continue to thrive, and that responsible recreational access is guaranteed well into the future.

John R. Welch, Director of Landscape and Site Preservation for Archaeology Southwest said, "We see all three of these bills as milestones in the journey toward ensuring that Tribes have a greater role in the management of public lands across the United States, and specifically in the Great Bend of the Gila. Because these lands are carved out of Indigenous Peoples' homelands, Tribes have and deserve the perpetual right to access and manage these lands. Furthermore, as the original caretakers of these places, Tribal Nations and their citizens have the knowledge necessary to manage public lands for the benefit of all people and for the future."

The Wilderness Society's Arizona State Director Mike Quigley said, "We commend and thank Congressman Grijalva for moving forward with this bill to protect this critically important cultural and ecological landscape. Permanent protection of the irreplaceable natural and cultural values of the Great Bend of the Gila landscape will help safeguard these fragile lands and ensure that all can experience these places for generations."

Bill Doelle, President & CEO of Archaeology Southwest, added, "Archaeology Southwest is honored to endorse and assist with all efforts to respectfully and permanently protect the Great Bend's incomparable cultural and natural values. All three bills are important steps toward ensuring that Indigenous Nations have the opportunity to resume stewardship in the places they always have and always will call homelands. Thank you, Congressman Grijalva."

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MORE INFORMATION

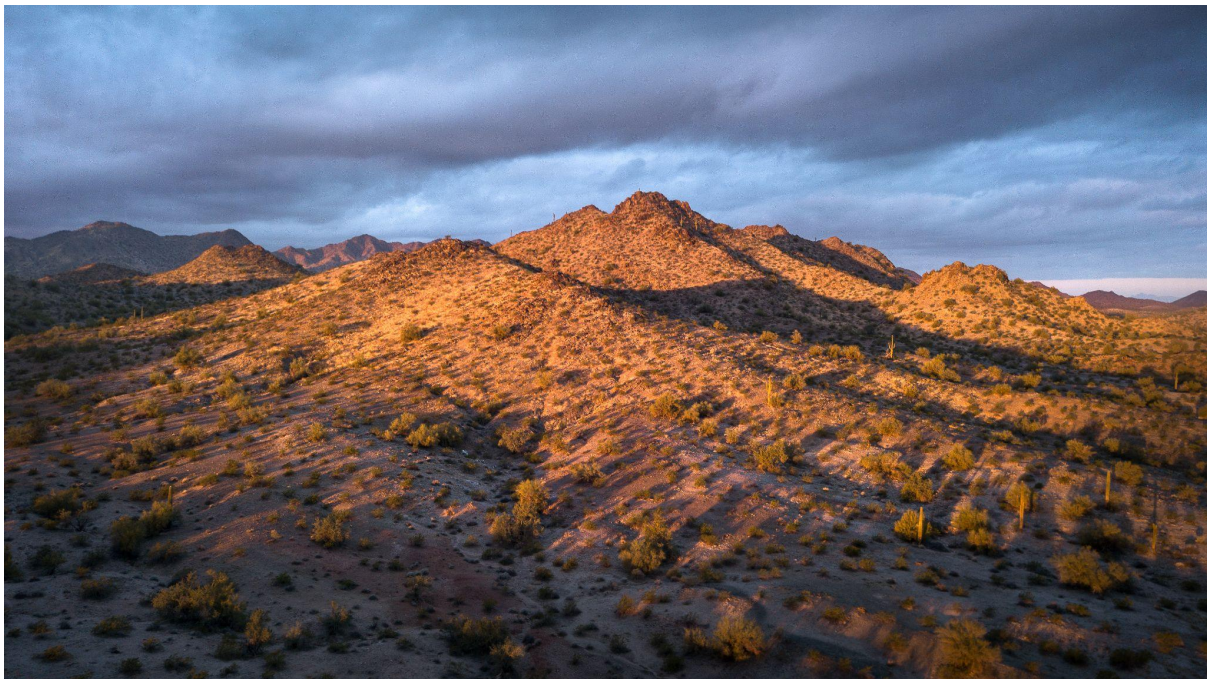
<https://www.respectgreatbend.org/>

13 federally-recognized Tribal nations with cultural, historical, spiritual, and ancestral ties to the region include, in alphabetical order: Ak-Chin Indian Community, Cocopah Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Fort Yuma-Quechan Indian Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Tohono O'odham Nation, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe. **See here for Rep. Grijalva's [press release and quotes](#) from Tribal entities.**

About the [Respect Great Bend Coalition](#): *The Respect Great Bend Coalition is united in efforts to permanently protect the natural and cultural landscapes of the Great Bend of the Gila, a stretch of river valley and surrounding Sonoran Desert between the cities of Phoenix and Yuma, Arizona. The public lands of the Great Bend of the Gila must be better protected in a way that recognizes their importance to Tribes, their cultural and historical values, and the role of these lands in providing habitat for plants and animals, combating climate change, and redressing water scarcity. Learn more at [respectgreatbend.org](#).*

[Link to photos](#)

Rep. Grijalva's [fact sheet](#)



*Great Bend of the Gila, Arizona
Photo: Mason Cummings, The Wilderness Society*