



A diverse community coalition praises introduction of bill to protect the Great Bend of the Gila

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PHOENIX, Ariz. — On Aug. 16, Representative Raúl Grijalva [introduced](#) the [Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act](#) 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's history, heritage, and natural values 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 like bighorn sheep, Sonoran desert tortoise, mule deer, Le Conte's thrasher, javelina, and the endangered Sonoran pronghorn.

Skylar Begay, Coordinator, Respect Great Bend, said, "As one of the coordinators for the Respect Great Bend campaign, I have spent ample time in the Great Bend of the Gila and can personally attest to its layered and multifaceted beauty. This place was, and is, *home* to Indigenous Peoples and to plant and animal relatives. In my role, I have seen passionate support for the protection of these values from Tribes, conservation organizations, and local residents, as well as people all over the Southwest. The Respect Great Bend Coalition thanks Representative Grijalva for his leadership in getting this place permanently protected."

The Wilderness Society Arizona Director Mike Quigley said, "We commend and thank Congressman Grijalva for introducing 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, Archaeology Southwest said, "We join our coalition partners in extending our thanks to Representative Grijalva for his longtime commitment to the Great Bend of the Gila, his attention to the Tribal Nations who have ongoing ties to this landscape, and his continuing vision in sponsoring this legislation. This is a globally significant landscape — invaluable and fragile. It preserves real human stories and Indigenous knowledge spanning millennia. Permanent protection will bring greater recognition, respectful visitation, and broad celebration."

Sandy Bahr, director for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter said, "We are honored to be part of this effort to protect the Great Bend of the Gila and support the Tribes with connections to this region in protecting the cultural and ecological values of this river valley and the surrounding Sonoran Desert. Keeping intact landscapes in this region is critical for wildlife, including desert bighorn sheep and desert tortoises, and will help to keep it more resilient to the impacts of climate change."

Olivia Juarez, Public Lands Program Director, GreenLatinos said, "Representative Grijalva has once again acted to ensure that sacred, irreplaceable places obtain their rightful place in the National Landscape Conservation System. GreenLatinos thanks Congressman Grijalva for working with Tribal nations as well as the community at large to permanently protect the Great Bend of the Gila landscape. We are excited to support this bill that will imbue native knowledge in the management of the Great Bend of the Gila for our planet, the climate, our more-than-human relatives, communities, and the many cultures which are rooted throughout the region."

The Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act recognizes the importance of the cultural, historical, spiritual, and ancestral ties that at least 13 federally-recognized Tribal nations maintain to the region. Those deep connections are embodied in thousands of fragile and irreplaceable cultural sites that are among some of the most important in the Southwest. The bill establishes a process for management consultation with a Tribal commission.

Representative Grijalva, a longtime champion of the effort, previously introduced permanent protection legislation for this region in 2013, 2016 and 2018.

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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