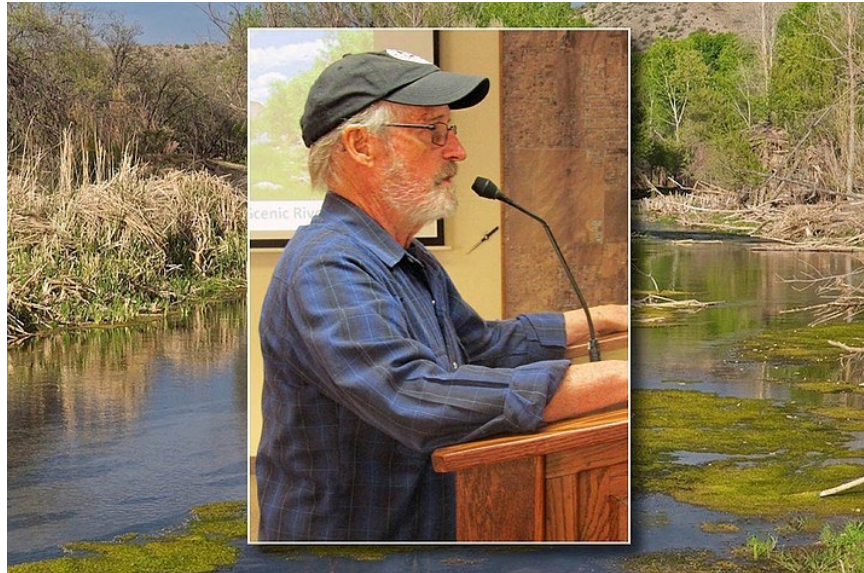


## Influencers: Gary Beverly works to protect Verde River

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*Gary Beverly works to have a 75-mile section of the Upper Verde River and two of its tributaries designated Wild and Scenic River. “The Verde River is one of the most important ecological resources in the Southwest and the last living river in the state,” he said. (Upper Verde River Wildlife Area/Gary Beverly. Inset: Stan Bindell/For the Courier)*

*Editor’s note: This is part of the continuing series on influencers and unsung heroes. To submit proposals, email [editors@prescottaz.com](mailto:editors@prescottaz.com).*

Gary Beverly, a member of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) Executive Committee, who is working to protect the Verde River, is attempting to have a 75-mile section of the Upper Verde River and two of its tributaries declared Wild and Scenic River, which would provide this section of the river with extra layers of protection. But this massive undertaking would take an act of Congress, which means he has to show Congress that a vast majority of the public supports the proposal.

Beverly has convinced a lot of people, as the Wild and Scenic River designation is backed by 140 businesses as well as the towns and cities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley,

Cottonwood, Clarkdale, Camp Verde and Sedona. The proposal is also backed by Yavapai County Board of Supervisors and Yavapai Apache Nation.

“There has been no significant opposition,” Beverly said.

Beverly emphasizes that he has not done this alone as American Rivers has taken it on as a major project, and The Wilderness Society has also put a lot of manpower into the project along with many Yavapai County residents.

“I have spent a lot of time on public education,” Beverly said. “It has been a long and difficult process.”

Beverly has given thousands of presentations and led many field trips to the Upper Verde River.

“When people get their boots in the river they understand. When people see the river they say “This is fantastic” and they want to protect it,” he said.

This has resulted in 1,500 people signing petitions to have the Upper Verde River declared Wild and Scenic.

“The Verde River is one of the most important ecological resources in the Southwest and the last living river in the state,” he said. “It is perennial and flowing for the full length. The vegetation growing on the banks is natural.”

Last March, Beverly went to Washington DC along with two representatives from American Rivers and two representatives from Yavapai Apache Nation and met with U.S. senators Mark Kelly and Kyrsten Sinema, as well as U.S. Rep. Eli Crane. He received no commitments from any of them, but they were all interested in learning more.

Kelly is a Democrat, Sinema is an Independent and Crane is a Republican as they seek bipartisan support for the Wild and Scenic designation.

Beverly is also talking to the ranching community and Arizona Game and Fish, which is responsible for a six-mile section of the Upper Verde River.

Beverly, who is also chairman of the Sierra Club’s Yavapai Group, has been working on this project since 2008. In 2006, he retired from a computer retail business and started hiking the Southwest.

“I feel that hiking heals my soul,” he said.

Beverly started taking backpacking hikes along the Verde River.

“I was stunned by how beautiful it is and how unknown it is,” he said.

However, Beverly was taken aback by how some of it had been degraded with trash or by vehicles driving through parts of it. He contacted Prescott National Forest and worked with them to enforce its own rules.

Through the Sierra Club and the community, a steering committee of 10 environmentalists was put together to work on the Wild and Scenic River designation. In 2010, Prescott National Forest determined the river was eligible for the Wild and Scenic River designation. The eligibility status requires Prescott National Forest to manage the Upper Verde River as a Wild and Scenic River until Congress decides otherwise.

Beverly said this decision was based on the work of dozens of scientists. He will return to Washington in March to see if a bill can move forward to give the Upper Verde River the Wild and Scenic River designation. He has no idea how long the process will take, as some bills take 10 years and others move along more quickly.

“There are a lot of forces out of our control. You have to be persistent and patient,” he said.

Beverly wants people to know what the Wild and Scenic Designation would do and would not do.

The Wild and Scenic designation for the Upper Verde River would:

\*Preserve this section of the river in its current condition for its Outstanding Remarkable Values which focus on botany, fishery, wildlife, scenery, recreation, cultural and historic, and geology.

The management plan would be created by the community and managed by Prescott National Forest.

“It would be customized to this river and it would be the community’s river,” he said.

Beverly said the designation would not:

- Change the existing water rights;
- Change private property rights;
- Guarantee the flow of water.

Beverly’s work on CWAG goes hand-in-hand with his work toward the Wild and Scenic designation for the Upper Verde River.

“I want to protect the river,” he continued. “The Wild and Scenic designation will not keep the river flowing. If there is no river, there is no water. If there is no water, there is no wildlife.”

Beverly said the threats to the Verde River come from outside the river’s boundary, because 80% of the Verde River comes from groundwater from the Big Chino aquifer. He said removing the groundwater would mean a reduction in the flow of the river.

Beverly said the groundwater faces three threats:

- If groundwater pumping is increased for expanded agriculture;
- If more domestic wells in Paulden are created; and
- If groundwater is imported as Prescott and Prescott Valley propose with the Big Chino Water Ranch to support population growth.

Beverly points to CWAG’S mission which is to protect the Prescott Active Management Area and the Verde River.

He said the Wild and Scenic Upper Verde River designation and CWAG’s mission are both important. The designation would make sure the river is responsibly managed and CWAG’s work would keep the river flowing.