

Wild Rivers Film Tour is Friday at Elks Theatre

By STAN BINDELL, For the Courier
May 28, 2025



Rachel Ellis, associate director of the Southwest River Protection Program, overlooks the Upper Verde River. (Courtesy photo)

f

✕

📷

✉

🖨

📄

🔖

The Wild Rivers Film Tour this year will emphasize the drive to make the Upper Verde River designation as a wild and scenic river, which would give the river a high level of protection while continuing to promote access for public recreation.

The film tour will be held Friday, May 30, at the Elks Theatre in Prescott. Doors will open at 6 p.m. with films starting at 7. Tickets, which are \$12, can be purchased at the door or online.

Local environmental groups will have tables at the event to inform the public about their causes including American Rivers, Natural History Institute, Sierra Club, Wild Arizona and Friends of the Verde.

Rachel Ellis, associate director for Southwest River Protection Program with American Rivers, said the Wild Rivers Film Tour is important because it gives the community a chance to come together to protect the Upper Verde River.

“I’m excited to share our love of rivers,” she said. “We want to help the Upper Verde River Wild and Scenic River designation drive with funding and awareness. We will have outreach materials and several speakers.”

Ellis said the Upper Verde River deserves the highest level of protection that the designation as a Wild and Scenic River designation would give it. The designation is federal and would need congressional approval so part of the evening will be promoting sending post cards and letters to members of Congress to support the designation.

"The designation would show the regional and national importance of the Upper Verde River," Ellis continued. "Everything that happens upstream influences what's downstream. The Upper Verde River also has 19 endangered species."

She said the recreational access to the Upper Verde is important to the community.

Gary Beverly, chairman of the Yavapai Group of the Sierra Club, said there will be an introduction of the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River effort along with acknowledgment of the team members and an invitation for others to join the team as well as a call to action.

Beverly said there will be swag for donations including stickers, tote bags, T-shirts and sweatshirts.

At a glance

Designation of the Upper Verde River as Wild and Scenic would:

- Ensure clean water keeps flowing downstream to towns, cities, and farms.
- Conserve scenery, fish and wildlife habitat, and cultural sites.
- Assure access for recreation, hunting, fishing, and traditional uses.
- Protect the free-flowing character of the river as it is today.
- Protect uses of private property, water rights, and existing grazing permits.
- Provide more resources for monitoring and management.
- Create opportunities for public involvement in river management.
- Keep the river clean, healthy, and free-flowing for future generations.

Impact of designation

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects rivers in five major ways:

- It bans new federally-licensed dams and harmful water development projects.
- It ensures water quality is maintained and, where possible, enhanced.
- It protects each river's outstanding values (e.g., scenery, culture, wildlife, recreation, etc.).
- It creates a junior, federally-reserved water right for the minimum flow necessary to maintain a river's outstanding values.
- It requires the development of a Comprehensive River Management Plan to guide management along designated rivers for a period of 10 to 20 years.

Facts on Wild and Scenic Rivers

As of March 2019, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System includes 226 river segments comprising 13,413 river miles across 41 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. This is less than one half of one percent of rivers in the U.S.

By comparison, more than 90,000 dams across the country have modified over 700,000 miles, or about 17% of U.S. rivers. The top six states in terms of Wild and Scenic river mileage are Alaska (3,210 miles), California (1,971 miles), Oregon (1,839 miles), Idaho (890 miles), Michigan (625 miles), and Wyoming (408 miles). Arizona has 57.3 miles designated as Wild and Scenic, which is less than 1/10th of 1% of the state's total river miles.

The Upper Verde River provides:

- Important habitat for fish, wildlife, and birds.
- A wide range of recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, hiking, swimming, birding, paddling, horseback riding, and a scenic railway.
- Stunning geology and scenery.
- Clean water for downstream users — farms and ranches, cities, and Indigenous communities.

Location of Upper Verde

Beverly said the Verde River is an extraordinary ribbon of life through the heart of Arizona. The Upper Verde – extending from east of Paulden to the town of Clarkdale – is one of the most clean, healthy, economically important, and culturally significant free-flowing rivers remaining in Arizona.

Beverly said the Upper Verde River faces unprecedented threats from drought, diminished flow, pollution, unmanaged recreation, and invasive species. He added the Upper Verde remains a refuge for wildlife and a sanctuary for people to enjoy and appreciate.

For more information, visit www.wildverderiver.org.

Seven films offered

Wild River Film Tour will have seven films about various rivers. Most of the films talk about several rivers including the Colorado River. One international film, *Near the River*, will discuss the issues at the Zambezi River in Africa. Another film, *Driving Sweep*, will show the rivers in Idaho.