

Wild River Film Tour has large turnout

By **STAN BINDELL**
For the Courier

The fourth annual Wild River Film Tour at the Elks Theatre sold out to a packed house May 29.

Along with the large turnout, the audience was a who's who of area environmentalists.

Prescott city officials in attendance included Mayor Cathey Rusing and Council members Jay Ruby, Patrick Grady and Mary Frederickson.

Joe Trudeau, a consultant for the Wilderness Society, said the film tour "brought out a ton of people who share values for the rivers they love."

"We shared feelings, both good and bad, for the places that we love that need protection," he said.

Trudeau, who was master of ceremonies for the event, said he wanted to recognize the Elks Theatre staff not only for helping to put on the event, but also for restoring the building to the best shape it has ever been in.

"This shows that the



Joe Trudeau from The Wilderness Society and Rachel Ellis from American Rivers enjoyed a sold out crowd at the Wild Rivers Tour at the Elks Theatre. (Stan Bindell/For the Courier)

community comes together for the things we love," he said.

Rachel Ellis, associate director of American Rivers Southwest River Protection Program, said

the turnout was inspiring and shows the feeling that people want to protect the rivers.

"We could not protect the environment without the community," she said.

The film tour, which will also have showings in New Mexico and Utah, was sponsored by American Rivers, the Wilderness Society, Upper Verde River Wild and Scenic River Coalition, Natural History Institute, Friends of the Verde River and the Sierra Club.

Representatives from these organizations staffed tables to discuss environmental issues with attendees.

Part of the evening was attendees filling out postcards asking U.S. Rep. Eli Crane to support designating the Upper Verde River as a wild and scenic river.

This designation represents the nation's highest level of river protection while allowing flexible community involvement.

The designation mandates perpetual free-flowing status, water quality protection and management plans requiring local stakeholders involvement. The designation would not allow dams or diversions.

The wild and scenic designation proposal has widespread bipartisan support from surrounding cities and towns, Yavapai County, Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, U.S. Sens. Mark Kelly and Reuben Gallego along with Arizona State Rep. Selina Bliss.

But Rep. Crane has not come out in support of the designation.

Ellis, a graduate of Prescott College, said the postcards are one tool to help secure the much deserved protection for the Upper Verde.

Trudeau said the Verde River is one of the most important rivers and the Upper Verde stretches about 50 miles from the headwaters in Paulden to Clarkdale.

"This is a great opportunity to protect the river," he said.

Trudeau said threats to the river include non-native fish and invasive plants, but he emphasized that the top threat is groundwater pumping.

Trudeau noted that a state park at Del Rio

Springs is planned and a rock climbing area near Sullivan Dam was recently purchased to save a rock climbing area. He praised the town of Chino Valley for supporting this purchase. Chino Valley Mayor Tom Armstrong and Chino Valley Town Manager Terri Denemy both attended the film tour.

The three films shown focused on the Colorado River, highlighting its importance to wildlife, tribal communities and other stakeholders.

The first film, "Monumental Moment," told the story of the indigenous led effort to secure the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni National Monument.

The second film, "What the River Knows," centered on the Glen Canyon area of the Colorado River, highlighting ecological healing.

The third film, "American Southwest," followed wildlife from the Colorado River headwaters to its delta. Highlights included 60-pound beavers and California condors.