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ALERT

FEATURED

Increased protections for Upper Verde River near final approval

DAILY SUN STAFF
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Logan Foll steers a packraft through a small rapid on the Verde River in this March 2026 file photo. The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality announced last week that the Upper Verde River and lower Sycamore Creek are close to final designations as "Outstanding Arizona Waters," which would bring additional water-quality protections.

Sam McLaughlin, Arizona Daily Sun file

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The Arizona Governor's Regulatory Review Council approved a proposal to grant "Outstanding Arizona Waters" status to the Upper Verde River and parts of Sycamore Creek last week. If approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency, the designation would prohibit the degradation of existing water quality, protecting wildlife habitat, threatened or endangered species, and outdoor recreation.

The sections to which the designation would be applied include the portion of the Verde from its headwaters near Paulden to its confluence with Sycamore Creek, as well as the lower four miles of Sycamore Creek. Outstanding Arizona Waters receive the state's strictest surface water quality protections.

“Designation of the Upper Verde River as an Outstanding Arizona Water will do a lot for the river and the communities that depend on it,” Jennifer Martin-McLeod stated in a press release.

Martin-McLeod is the Water Sentinels Program Manager for the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, which nominated the Upper Verde for additional protection. The nomination was supported by the Arizona Riparian Council, the Verde River Institute, Friends of the Verde River, Citizens Water Advocacy Group, the Center for Biological Diversity, American Whitewater, The Wilderness Society and American Rivers.

“This designation provides an important layer of protection for the water quality of the river,” Martin-McLeod continued. “We appreciate the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality for recognizing the importance of the Upper Verde by establishing this special designation.”

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The Verde River provides a riparian corridor linking six wilderness areas, eight inventoried roadless areas, three national forests, one national monument, two Wild and Scenic Rivers -- a 40-mile stretch of the Verde, and tributary Fossil Creek -- and two state parks. Some sections are relatively remote, but others pass through or close to the communities of Clarkdale, Cottonwood and Camp Verde.

Earlier this year, Arizona Daily Sun reporter Sam McLaughlin wrote about the experience of floating the Verde River just downstream of the Sycamore Creek confluence, concluding that the Verde “offers relative solitude, windows into the natural and cultural history of the region, and enough challenges to keep novice paddlers amused.”

Tags

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Sycamore Creek (contra Costa County)

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