



## **Frequently Asked Questions for Sportsmen & Women**

### **Gila Wild & Scenic Designation Proposal**

#### **What is Wild & Scenic Designation?**

Wild & Scenic Designation for the Gila River is governed by the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, which was created by Congress in 1968 to conserve and protect rivers for their natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

In New Mexico, three rivers have been granted Wild & Scenic designation spanning a footprint of 124 miles, less than one tenth of one percent of the state's river miles. These stretches include small portions of the Rio Chama, Rio Grande, Pecos River, and the East Fork of the Jemez River. Meanwhile, other Western states, such as Idaho and Oregon, enjoy more protected waterways for sportsmen to enjoy under the Wild & Scenic Designation. Idaho has nearly 900 river miles of Wild & Scenic designation and Oregon nearly 2,000 river miles.

Wild & Scenic designation can be achieved through Congressional action or by special designation from the Secretary of the Department of Interior.

#### **How would Wild & Scenic Designation change the way the Gila River is managed?**

Wild & Scenic designation facilitates a river management plan that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing the standards and goals for how a Wild & Scenic river is managed. There is no set management blueprint, and the public gets a large say in how it's managed.

But as each river in the National Wild & Scenic System is administered differently, they're managed with the primary goal of protecting and enhancing the values that caused it to be designated. In the case of the Gila River, NMWF strongly believes that the Gila is an exemplary candidate for Wild & Scenic designation, as it is one of the nation's last wild and free-flowing rivers in the Southwest, with no large dams to impede the natural flow of waters. The Gila is also where Aldo Leopold, NMWF's founder, helped convince the U.S. Forest Service to protect the headwaters of this unique New Mexican treasure, leading to the nation's first designated Wilderness area under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

For sportsmen and women in New Mexico, the Gila River and surrounding forest represent an oasis of biological diversity and recreation opportunities at every bend of the river and its'

tributaries. Home to high desert and forest landscapes and one of the world's largest Ponderosa Pine habitats, the Gila sustains abundant game and non-game species such as wild turkey, Mearns's quail, pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, javelina, mountain lion, black bear, and an incredibly diverse bird population.

Under Wild & Scenic designation, sportsmen and women would be primary stakeholders in deciding how the river is managed to ensure that hunting and fishing opportunities are enhanced and preserved for future generations.

Other established management principles under Wild & Scenic designations include:

- Disallowing the construction of new federally-licensed dams and other harmful water-development projects
- Ensures that water quality is maintained and enhanced
- Creates a federally-reserved water right for the minimum amount of water to maintain the river's special values, and does not affect existing water rights or the existing adjudication of states and the federal government over waters
- Restricts activities that would harm a river's special values
- Calls for the development of a Comprehensive River Management plan for a period of 10-20 years

### **How does Wild & Scenic Designation benefit sportsmen and women?**

Wild & Scenic designation would protect the outstanding habitat and water quality in the Gila River, some of its tributaries, and maintain or enhance the standard of management that benefits wildlife and recreation. By ensuring that the Gila River is managed to protect its remarkable biodiversity and recreation opportunities, Wild & Scenic designation would ensure the ecological integrity of the Gila River and riparian areas to ensure that current and future generations of hunters and anglers get to experience the Gila as it is today, if not better. Wild & Scenic designation neither limits the public from access nor opens private lands to public access, and has no effect on hunting and fishing where those uses were allowed prior to designation.

### **What is the proposed designation area?**

Although no formal legislation has been introduced in Congress or inventory defined by the U.S. Forest Service, the NMWF has worked with a group of stakeholders in the region to support the designation of the Gila River through the main stem of the Mogollon Box, the Gila Wilderness, the Gila Middle Box, and the Gila Lower Box, as well as portions of the East, Middle, and West forks of the Gila. The proposal also includes the San Francisco River through the Upper Frisco Box, the Devil's Creek Roadless Area, and the San Francisco River Canyon, as well as a series of other creeks. For a proposed map, [click here](#).

The proposal also identifies parts of the Gila River to be designated under different characteristics of Wild & Scenic values, which are:

**\*Wild River Areas** – Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted.

**\*Scenic River Areas** – Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.

**\*Recreational River Areas** – Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

*\*Source: Rivers.gov*

### **Who supports Wild & Scenic designation for the Gila?**

- New Mexico Wildlife Federation
- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
- Trout Unlimited
- Doña Ana Consolidated Sportsmen
- Wild Turkey Sportsmen's Association
- New Mexico Sportsmen
- .. and the list is growing.

### **What is the timeline for designation?**

There is no firm timeline for designation, however, NMWF is advocating to New Mexico's Congressional Designation that a Wild & Scenic Designation bill be introduced in the 115th Congress.

### **What can I do to get more involved?**

- [Sign on to our letter](#) to U.S. Senators Heinrich and Udall
- Share your Gila hunting and fishing photos with us by emailing them to [gabe@nmwildlife.org](mailto:gabe@nmwildlife.org)
- Share your Gila hunting and fishing stories by emailing them to [gabe@nmwildlife.org](mailto:gabe@nmwildlife.org)
- Stay up to date on our Gila Wild & Scenic alerts by [joining our mailing list](#), and following us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#)