



August 19, 2021

Michiko Martin  
Regional Forester  
US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Via email - [michiko.martin@usda.gov](mailto:michiko.martin@usda.gov)

**Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase 1)  
Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest**

Dear Ms. Martin:

Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation (AZSFWC) is a 501c-3 non-profit organization dedicated to wildlife conservation, habitat work, youth recruitment and retention, as well as educating outdoor enthusiasts on issues important to their passions. AZSFWC consists of 38 member, affiliate, and associate groups that reach across the spectrum of hunting, angling, shooting, outdoor recreation, and businesses from across Arizona. Our member groups represent more than 16,000 people from Arizona.

AZSFWC is a signatory of the Upper Verde Fact Sheet and supports responsible management and conservation of the Verde River and its watershed. AZSFWC has also been a longtime advocate and supporter of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), for purposes and projects just like this one proposed by the Prescott National Forest (Forest).

AZSFWC strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2023 LWCF request by the Forest with a planned acquisition of approximately 7,800 acres of the historic Yavapai Ranch (Ranch) in Yavapai County, Arizona. The 52,000-acre Ranch comprises the largest remaining private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

This first phase LWCF acquisition will secure twelve 640-acre sections within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest system lands located 40 miles from the growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. Additional LWCF phases and other complementary efforts are planned to further consolidate ownership and protect resource values in the Verde River watershed. This includes an ongoing exchange between the Forest and Yavapai Apache Nation (Nation) to add six sections of former Ranch land to the Forest adjacent to this first phase acquisition. In addition, a Farm Bill Agricultural Conservation Easement is proposed to protect eight privately-owned sections within the checkerboard, which AZSFWC is also supporting. These combined efforts will secure permanent protection for the eastern third of the Ranch.

AZSFWC Support for Upper Verde Watershed-Yavapai Ranch LWCF Request from Prescott NF – 8-19-21

Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation  
PO Box 75731 New River, AZ 85087

This proposed LWCF acquisition will result in the following conservation benefits:

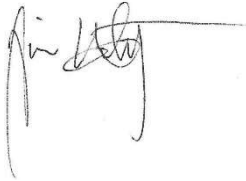
1. Enhanced recreational access and consolidated resource protection for more than 19,000 acres. The Ranch provides important access points to Juniper Mesa Wilderness and thousands of acres of adjacent forest, woodlands, and grasslands that are treasured by outdoor recreation enthusiasts and hunters. These private lands are currently open to the public, but if sold for development that access could be lost forever. This acquisition will secure permanent public access and enhance efforts by the Forest to expand recreational trails and other opportunities. It will reduce associated operations and maintenance costs. Further, lands acquired in this first LWCF phase will connect to Juniper Mesa Wilderness upon completion of the exchange between the Forest and the Nation.
2. Protection of the Upper Verde River and state water supplies. Flows from the 190-mile Verde River are lifeblood for Arizona. Growing municipalities at its headwaters are dependent on the same groundwater that supports flow in the upper river for their future needs. Downstream communities of the Verde Valley depend on the river for irrigated agriculture, native fish and wildlife habitat, and river recreation that drives tourism and economic prosperity. Even further downstream, the river provides a critical source of drinking water for over 4 million people in metropolitan Phoenix. The river is both sacred and essential to multiple Native American Tribes with reservations and ancestral lands in the watershed. Critical strategies for protecting flows in the upper 25 miles of river include maintaining watershed health and preventing groundwater withdrawals associated with residential development and large-scale commercial agriculture in Big Chino sub-basin. The Ranch land in this first phase LWCF acquisition drains into the Big Chino sub-basin of the watershed and includes a network of roads that would otherwise facilitate development from the only major county road. There is explosive growth in Yavapai County, which coupled with the threat of large-scale commercial agriculture will have adverse effects on the water tables and drinking water supplies in Mohave County a few hours' drive to the northwest along Interstate 40.
3. Protection of important linkages within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America. The Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) includes lands that are resilient to climate change and provide a pathway for species to travel northward as the climate warms. This first phase LWCF acquisition includes forest, woodland, and grassland habitats within the RCN, along with critically important wildlife movement corridors. Specifically, it is within the Grand Canyon to Prescott Corridor Complex, identified in AZ Game and Fish's State Wildlife Action Plan Update 2020 as critical for all wildlife given that this area has the highest future potential for fragmentation and development in the state. This corridor is especially important for game species (mountain lion, black bear, javelina, mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, and Merriam's turkey) and grassland obligate birds and wildlife that are rapidly declining due to grassland conversion.
4. Contribution to downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River. The first phase LWCF acquisition also builds upon successful multi-partner efforts and

federal investments in Verde River conservation. These include multiple LWCF acquisitions by both the Forest and adjacent Coconino National Forest along the Verde River, Sycamore Creek, and Fossil Creek; recent Farm Bill Agricultural Land Easement acquisitions that protect the largest remaining farms along the river in the Verde Valley; and the Verde River Flow and Habitat Restoration Regional Conservation Partnership Project that has enhanced flows along 20 miles of river through irrigation efficiency improvements and restored over 6,000 acres of habitat along the river corridor.

AZSFWC and 28 of our member organizations (list attached) consider conserving the Verde River watershed, protecting resilient wildlife movement and migration corridors, and enhancing public access for multiple recreational uses as some of our top priorities. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch LWCF project provides an important contribution towards those conservation objectives and outcomes!

Thank you for considering this request from the Forest for FY 2023 LWCF funding for this first phase of acquisition.

Yours in Conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Unmacht", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jim Unmacht  
Executive Director

cc:

Dale Deiter, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest

[dale.deiter@usda.gov](mailto:dale.deiter@usda.gov)

Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region

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**AZSFWC Member Organizations Supporting the  
Upper Verde Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase 1)  
LWCF Request from the Prescott National Forest**

Anglers United  
AZ Antelope Foundation  
AZ Bass Nation  
AZ Big Game Super Raffle  
AZ Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
AZ Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation  
AZ Chapter of Safari Club International  
AZ Council of Trout Unlimited  
AZ Deer Association  
AZ Desert Bighorn Sheep Society  
AZ Elk Society  
AZ Flycasters Club  
AZ Houndsmen's Association  
AZ Outdoor Adventures  
AZ Outdoor Sports  
Ben Avery Clay Busters  
Christian Hunters of America  
Mohave Sportsman Club  
Mule Deer Foundation  
Outdoor Experience 4 All  
South Eastern AZ Sportsmen Club  
Southern AZ Quail Forever  
Southwest Wildlife Foundation  
Valley of the Sun Quail Forever  
SRT Outdoors  
The Bass Federation of AZ  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club

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