



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 2, 2026

Contact: Sandy Bahr, Sierra Club (602) 999-5790, sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org

**Upper Verde River Gains Greater Protection
Outstanding Arizona Water Designation Finalized**

Phoenix, AZ – Yesterday, the Governor’s Regulatory Review Council gave final approval to a rule to establish the Upper Verde River as an Outstanding Arizona Water (OAW). The Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter had nominated the portion of the Verde extending from the headwaters near Paulden to the confluence with Sycamore Creek, as well as the lower 4 miles of Sycamore Creek, for consideration by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).

“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,” said **Jennifer Martin-McLeod, Water Sentinels Program Manager for the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter**. “This designation provides an important layer of protection for the water quality of the river. We appreciate the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality for recognizing the importance of the Upper Verde by establishing this special designation.”

The nomination described the potential benefits of designation: “Recognizing the outstanding qualities of the proposed Upper Verde Outstanding Arizona Water will provide for protection and maintenance of current water quality conditions, thus protecting the exceptional tourism, recreational, and agricultural economic benefits that exist downstream .”

The Verde River above Horseshoe Dam is the longest (162 miles) and the last perennial, free-flowing, relatively pristine river in Arizona and the Southwest. The OAW represents the upper third of a remarkable riparian habitat corridor, connecting six Wilderness Areas, eight Inventoried Roadless Areas, three National Forests, one National Monument, two Wild and Scenic Rivers, two State Parks, two Important Bird Areas, and one Wildlife Preserve.

“The OAW designation not only helps protect recreation and extensive cultural resources, but it also recognizes the upper Verde River as a treasure in the Southwest,” said **Gary Beverly, vice-Chair of**

Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter. “Sierra Club first proposed OAW status in 2012, so it feels great to achieve our goal. We are grateful for cooperation and assistance from ADEQ.”

In addition to the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, 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.

The Verde is threatened by diversions and groundwater pumping, which are exacerbated by prolonged drought and climate change, so additional efforts to protect it are critical.

The Sierra Club is one of the largest and most influential grassroots environmental organizations in the U.S., with more than 3.5 million members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person’s right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. The Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, representing 12,000 members, has long advocated for Arizona rivers, including via its Water Sentinels program.

###