



Advocacy partner of Environmental Defense Fund

July 29, 2024

The Honorable Senator Mark Kelly  
516 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Senator Kyrsten Sinema  
317 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Schweikert  
Arizona District 1 Representative  
460 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Juan Ciscomani  
Arizona District 6 Representative  
1429 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Andy Biggs  
Arizona District 5 Representative  
252 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ruben Gallego  
Arizona District 3 Representative  
1114 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Eli Crane  
Arizona District 2 Representative  
1229 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Gosar  
Arizona District 9 Representative  
2057 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva  
Arizona District 7 Representative  
1203 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Stanton  
Arizona District 4 Representative  
207 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Lesko  
Arizona District 8 Representative  
1214 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Members of Congress  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for the Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024, H.R. 8949

Dear Arizona Delegation and Members of Congress:

On behalf of Environmental Defense Action Fund (EDF Action) and over 90,000 EDF Action members and activists living across the State of Arizona, we submit this letter in full support of the Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024 (Settlement Act). We are grateful for the leadership of the Arizona Delegation on this critical issue, and we respectfully request that Congress swiftly enact this historic legislation.

EDF Action works with many stakeholders, Tribes, communities, governments, and other groups on water issues throughout Arizona, serving the public interest in pursuit of water security for all people, now and into the future. We have partnered with Yavapai-Apache Nation (the Nation), local governments, and community groups in the Verde watershed for over a decade. Much of our focus is ensuring rural communities, who often face critical water needs and tend to be overlooked, enjoy stable and healthy water supplies as a foundation for self-determination, community health and well-being, and prosperity. The Settlement Act represents a historic leap forward toward these goals.

The Settlement Act ratifies and funds the recently completed [Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Agreement](#), which resolves the Nation's water rights claims, brings additional, sustainable water supplies to the Verde Valley, protects local groundwater supplies, and helps keep the Verde River flowing. The Settlement Act will also finalize a land exchange (if it is not completed through the administrative process by the time the Act is passed) that supports the Nation in securing a permanent Tribal homeland that will meet the needs of a growing population and economy.

The Verde River is one of the last free flowing rivers left in the Southwestern U.S., it is a unique global treasure that has been central to local cultures, economies, community health and identity, and ways of life, since time immemorial. However, flows in the river have steadily declined in recent decades due to groundwater pumping and a drying climate. A primary goal of the Nation's Settlement is to help maintain flows in the Verde River for the benefit of the Nation, neighboring communities, federal partners including for the designated National Wild and Scenic River segment downstream of the Nation, and all who rely on a healthy flowing Verde River.

In testimony before Congress on July 24, 2024, Yavapai-Apache Nation Chairwoman Tanya Lewis stated: "The passage of H.R. 8949 to ratify the Yavapai-Apache Nation's Water Rights Settlement Agreement is essential if our Nation is to finally attain a secure water future and a permanent Tribal homeland for the *Yavepé* and *Dilzhé'é* people. In this time of persistent drought and aridification in Arizona, we must take concrete and generational action to secure the long-term needs of our communities....it is now time for the Nation, with the assistance of our trustee the United States, to build the water infrastructure needed to ensure that the Nation

can continue to live and thrive in the Verde Valley as was guaranteed to us in our Treaty with the United States.”

We acknowledge the steadfast leadership of Chairwoman Lewis, the Nation’s Tribal Council, Elders, and staff, and all those who came before, on the road to achieve this truly special, historic agreement that will help safeguard the water future of the Nation, neighboring communities, and all who depend on a healthy, flowing Verde River.

We respectfully ask Congress to take the next step: Enact the Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CKuzdas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Kuzdas, PhD  
Arizona Water Program Director  
Environmental Defense Action Fund  
Flagstaff, Arizona  
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[ckuzdas@EDFAction.org](mailto:ckuzdas@EDFAction.org)

cc:

Chairwoman Tanya Lewis, Yavapai-Apache Nation

Pam Williams, Secretary’s Indian Water Rights Office, Department of Interior