



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

Daniel Stellar, State Director
The Nature Conservancy in Arizona
Phoenix Conservation Center
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Phoenix, Arizona 85020

July 19, 2024

The Honorable Bryan Newland
Ms. Lynn Trujillo
Mr. Dave Palumbo
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Trujillo, Mr. Newland and Mr. Palumbo,

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, please accept this letter of support for the Yavapai-Apache Nation Tribal Water Settlement Act of 2024 which has a hearing in House Natural Resources on Tuesday of next week. The Nature Conservancy has worked for decades with local partners in the Verde River basin, including the Yavapai-Apache Nation, to protect water quality and quantity, and preserve ecologically important places while keeping healthy working landscapes in production.

After decades of negotiation, the Yavapai-Apache Nation has reached agreement with the Salt River Project, the State of Arizona, local communities, and others to achieve a final resolution of the Nation's longstanding water rights claims. Unlike other Indian reservations, the Yavapai-Apache Nation's Reservation is made up of several non-contiguous land areas that are intertwined geographically and economically with our neighboring off-reservation communities. For this reason, when the Verde Valley thrives, the Yavapai-Apache Nation thrives. This resolution has been executed in a way that brings both renewable water supplies to the Verde Valley and helps keep the Verde River flowing as one of Arizona's few remaining perennial rivers.

The central pillar of this settlement is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to construct a pipeline to deliver water from the C.C. Cragin Reservoir on the Mogollon Rim to the Yavapai-Apache Nation, where it will be treated to drinking water standards for distribution on the Reservation, and potentially, to local off-reservation communities under specific circumstances spelled out in the draft legislation. Building the Cragin-Verde pipeline will finally provide water security for the Nation by delivering a renewable water supply to the Verde Valley, thereby reducing reliance on groundwater resources. This same pipeline will also protect flows in the Verde River, which is a cultural resource for the Yavapai-Apache Nation and an economic driver for the entire Verde Valley.

The Nature Conservancy values the Yavapai-Apache Nation's commitment to water security for not only their tribal community, but the entire Verde Valley. We fully support the Yavapai-Apache Nation Tribal Water Settlement Act of 2024 and look forward to the Department's support as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel S. Stellar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniel Stellar
State Director, The Nature Conservancy in Arizona