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### Congress Passes Omnibus Package, Designates Arizona’s Second Wild and Scenic River at Fossil Creek

*Designation to protect 14 miles of continuous free-flowing water and tribal spiritual site.*

**[Watch President Obama sign the bill into law on March 30th in the East Room of the White House.](#)**

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PHOENIX—A massive package of public lands bills has safely made it through the winding passages of the House and Senate this week, protecting major heritage areas, wilderness lands, and wild and scenic rivers across the United States. Arizona’s very own Fossil Creek—a critical riparian waterway in the Verde River ecosystem—has been designated a Wild and Scenic River as part of the lands package, making it only the second such designation in Arizona history.



Fossil Creek’s underwater majesty is now protected. Photo copyright Nick Berezenko.

“This is a tremendously rewarding day for all Arizonans because Fossil Creek is an irreplaceable icon of natural and cultural significance in the state,” says Kevin Gaither-Banchoff, executive director of the statewide Arizona Wilderness Coalition, which has worked collaboratively with stakeholders to secure Wild and Scenic protection for the creek. “Our work isn’t finished with designation, though. Since so many people love Fossil Creek, we must ensure that increased visitation isn’t abusing the water quality, wildlife, and vegetation that make it ecologically and culturally significant.”

With the recent removal of a historic Arizona Public Service dam, the designation will protect more than 14 continuous miles of year-round water; ensure the survival of five rare, native Arizona fishes; and preserve the hunting, gathering, and spiritual traditional sites of the Yavapai-Apache Nation. Increased visitation to Fossil Creek is having a negative impact: the U.S. Forest Service regularly must deal with trampled riparian vegetation, abandoned camping trash, diapers, and soiled toilet paper in the creek itself.

“Fossil Creek is hallowed ground for us as a people,” says Thomas Beauty, Chairman of the Yavapai-Apache Nation. “We celebrate this extra protection that will help the U.S. Forest Service better manage and educate the visitors who come to Fossil Creek to enjoy its beauty and pristine waters. To our traditional Apache people, it is important that this holy and culturally significant place is protected from litter, pollution, and a damaged ecological environment. The Nation has been working for many years to

protect Fossil Creek, beginning with the decommissioning of the Childs-Irving Hydro Electric power plant. We have demonstrated our commitment, both as stewards of the land and as an indigenous society with cultural and historical connections to the area, and will continue to advocate and work to protect one of our holiest sites. We have invested our time and resources, working with the various stakeholders and representatives to Congress. And we are appreciative of the efforts of the Arizona delegation.”

Enacted in 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides a national policy and program to preserve and protect selected rivers, or segments of rivers, in their free-flowing condition in the National System. All Wild and Scenic rivers are required to have a Comprehensive River Management Plan which guides the agency in how they will protect the outstanding river values identified in its original proposal.

“These are troubled times for a lot of Americans,” says Sam Frank, central Arizona director for the Arizona Wilderness Coalition. “But Fossil Creek offers the quality kind of outdoor experience that many families can afford. With proper stewardship and continued vigilance, this is a special place that will keep giving back for generations to come.”

Using the 1968 Act, the Fossil Creek bill was introduced by Senator John McCain (R) in 2007 and is fully supported by District 1 Representative Ann Kirkpatrick (D) in the House. In addition to the Fossil Creek designation, the package contains a measure to codify the National Landscape Conservation System, sponsored by Arizona Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Dist. 7). Comprised of 26 million acres of the crown jewels administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the Conservation System is focused on preserving intact Western landscapes with historical antiquities in their original settings. The bill also allows the Arizona National Scenic Trail to become part of the National Trail System, where it will receive federal monies for management and interpretive support.

The Omnibus Lands package is the largest designation of new wilderness since 1994, protecting wild areas across nine states (CA, CO, ID, MI, NM, OR, UT, VA and WV). The package will go to President Barack Obama for signature in the coming weeks.

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The Yavapai-Apache Nation is a sovereign Native American tribe from the Verde Valley. Tribal members have two culturally distinct backgrounds and speak two indigenous languages. Today, the Yavapai-Apache Nation thrives on a reservation that spans over 1,800 acres in the four communities of Camp Verde, Middle Verde, Clarkdale, and Rimrock. The Nation proudly owns and operates Cliff Castle Casino, Yavapai-Apache Construction, Yavapai-Apache Sand & Gravel and Yavapai-Apache Gaming, an enterprise that has successfully completed five start-up casinos nationwide. For additional information regarding the Yavapai-Apache Nation please contact the Office of Public Relations at (928) 567-1006 or visit [www.yavapai-apache.org](http://www.yavapai-apache.org).

*The Arizona Wilderness Coalition (AWC) is an organization of groups and individuals whose mission is to protect and restore wilderness lands and waters in Arizona.*