

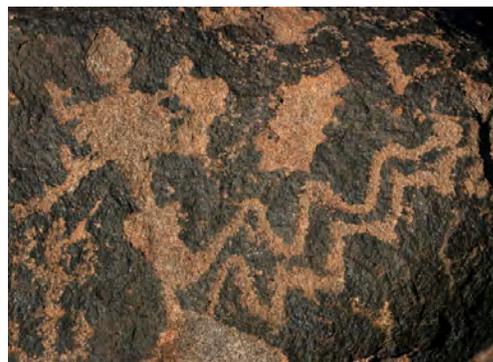
GREAT BEND OF THE GILA CONSERVATION ACT

August 2022

On Aug. 16, 2022, Natural Resources Committee Chair Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.) introduced the *Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act* to protect cultural, historical, archeological, and natural resources across more than 400,000 acres of the Great Bend of the Gila and Sonoran Desert landscape in southern Arizona.

GREAT BEND OF THE GILA IS A CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND NATURAL LANDMARK

The Great Bend of the Gila is one of the most culturally significant and ecologically fragile landscapes in the southwestern United States. For at least 3,000 years, Indigenous peoples inhabited the area, which often served as a meeting point for diverse peoples and cultures. They built habitations, cultivated the landscape through innovative irrigation canals, and left countless petroglyphs and other forms of rock art.



Today, at least 13 federally recognized tribes maintain cultural connections to Great Bend. Their efforts to protect the area have spearheaded the designation of nationally significant sites, including Sears Point, Paint Rock Petroglyph Site, and Gillespie Dam Bridge, which are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The natural landscape of Great Bend is unique and magnificent, featuring jagged cliffs, pronounced lava flows, and unique and fragile desert species.

THE GREAT BEND OF THE GILA CONSERVATION ACT WILL PROTECT THIS IMPORTANT AREA

The *Great Bend of Gila Conservation Act* represents nearly a decade of work by Chair Grijalva and nearby tribes and communities to protect the area. The bill will establish the 330,000-acre Great Bend of the Gila National Conservation Area, the 47,000-acre Palo Verde National Conservation Area, and nearly 60,000 acres of new wilderness. These designations will preserve the region's deep Indigenous history, including rock art and carvings, remains of ancestral village structures, and geoglyphs, all of which are currently under threat of vandalism and destruction.

This legislation will protect the fragile landscape from further degradation, limit destructive development of roads, withdraw lands from new mineral development, and require the development of new management plans to prevent resource damage.

A MODEL FOR TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC LANDS

The *Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act* includes novel language to significantly enhance tribal governments' role in management of this ancestral landscape. The bill mirrors provisions from H.R. 8109, the *Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act*, introduced by Chair Grijalva in June 2022, to establish a tribal commission to provide formal input on land management. These provisions also draw from the recently reinstated Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Commission, which is setting the standard for tribal co-management of public lands.

The Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act is supported by multiple tribes, including the Gila River Indian Community, the Cocopah Indian Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, as well as The Wilderness Society and Archaeology Southwest.