

Great Bend of the Gila Establishment Act

On August 2, 2024, Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.) introduced the Great Bend of the Gila National Monument Establishment Act to protect cultural, historical, archeological, and natural resources across more than 350,000 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 thousands of years, Indigenous peoples maintained ancestral, cultural, and spiritual connections to the area, which often served as a meeting point for diverse peoples and cultures. They lived and cared for the lands, 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 National Monument Establishment Act will protect this important area.

The Great Bend of the Gila National Monument Establishment Act represents nearly a decade of work by Ranking Member Grijalva, Tribes, and communities to protect this significant area and would establish the 376,963-acre Great Bend of the Gila National Monument.

The National Monument would preserve the region's deep Indigenous history, including rock art and carvings, remains of ancestral village structures, and geoglyphs, and protect the fragile landscape from further vandalism, destruction, and 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 National Monument Establishment Act includes language to significantly enhance tribal governments' role in the management of this ancestral landscape. The bill mirrors provisions from H.R. 6147, the Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act, introduced by Ranking Member Grijalva in November 2023, to establish a tribal commission to provide formal input on land management. These provisions also draw from the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Commission and the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon Commission.

The Great Bend of the Gila National Monument Establishment Act is supported by multiple tribes, including the Tohono O'odham Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, and Quechan Indian Tribe, as well as Archaeology Southwest, Arizona Faith Network, Center for Biological Diversity, Chispa Arizona, Conservation Lands Foundation, Green Latinos, HECHO, League of Conservation Voters, National Parks Conservation Association, Sierra Club, The Conservation Alliance, and The Wilderness Society.