

Adelita S. Grijalva, Chair, District 5

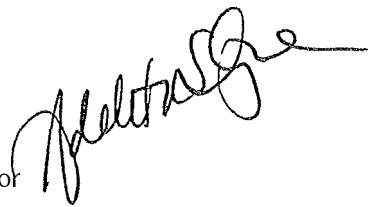
## M E M O R A N D U M

**DATE:** June 18, 2024

**TO:** Melissa Manriquez, Clerk of the Board

**FROM:** Adelita Grijalva, Chair and District Five Supervisor

**REGARDING:** Item for the July 2, 2024, Regular Agenda



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Please add the following to the July 2, 2024, Regular Agenda:

**Board of Supervisors**

Discussion/Direction/Action. Proposal to send a joint letter with Santa Cruz County to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in support of creating a Santa Cruz River Urban National Wildlife Refuge that would span the two counties. The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors will be considering approval of this letter on July 2 as well (District 5)

Thank you

JUN 18 2024 04:01 PM CLERK OF BOARD  
ASB

Director Martha Williams  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240, USA

Director Williams:

As the leadership of Pima and Santa Cruz Counties, we are writing together to urge you to designate the country's newest urban national wildlife refuge along the Santa Cruz River. This refuge would span bot of our counties, linking vital wildlife habitat and migration corridors for future generations of people and wildlife.

The Santa Cruz River provides vital habitat and connectivity and has done so since time immemorial. The river flows through the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with the Santa Cruz watershed being home to the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui, whose relationships with the land and river continue to this day.

A string of protected islands of land spanning both Santa Cruz and Pima Counties and united as the Santa Cruz River Urban National Wildlife Refuge would protect fish and wildlife habitat connectivity, boost outdoor access for hundreds of thousands of people (including many of whom live in Justice40-qualifying neighborhoods), and enhance the local economy through nature-based tourism. We recognize that recreation and eco-tourism are major drivers of Arizona's economy, contributing \$9.8 billion to the state GDP each year. Nature-based tourism in our counties is an especially important economic driver, as the Santa Cruz River is a birding hotspot and attracts people from around the world.

The Santa Cruz River is vital habitat for hundreds of iconic species, including the crested caracara, Gould's turkey, mountain lion, and Coues deer, as well as for critically endangered species such as the Gila topminnow, southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo. Critical habitat connections between Santa Cruz and Pima Counties are dependent upon the Santa Cruz River.

Thousands of our constituents have united to urge you and Secretary Deb Haaland to use administrative authority to designate an urban national wildlife refuge along the Santa Cruz River. Both our counties have already unanimously passed formal support for this effort. We're following up on those statements with this joint letter. Please consider us dedicated partners in this effort.

Thank you. We look forward to next steps.