

Arizona: Prescott National Forest

State	Arizona
Congressional Districts	AZ-02
Region/Forest	R3/Prescott National Forest
Priority	1
Project Name	Prescott National Forest
Acres	3,798
Price	\$10,000,000

Location: Known as Yavapai Ranch, in Northwestern Arizona, Yavapai County; 40 miles north of Prescott and 70 miles west of Flagstaff. Two hours north of Phoenix metro area.



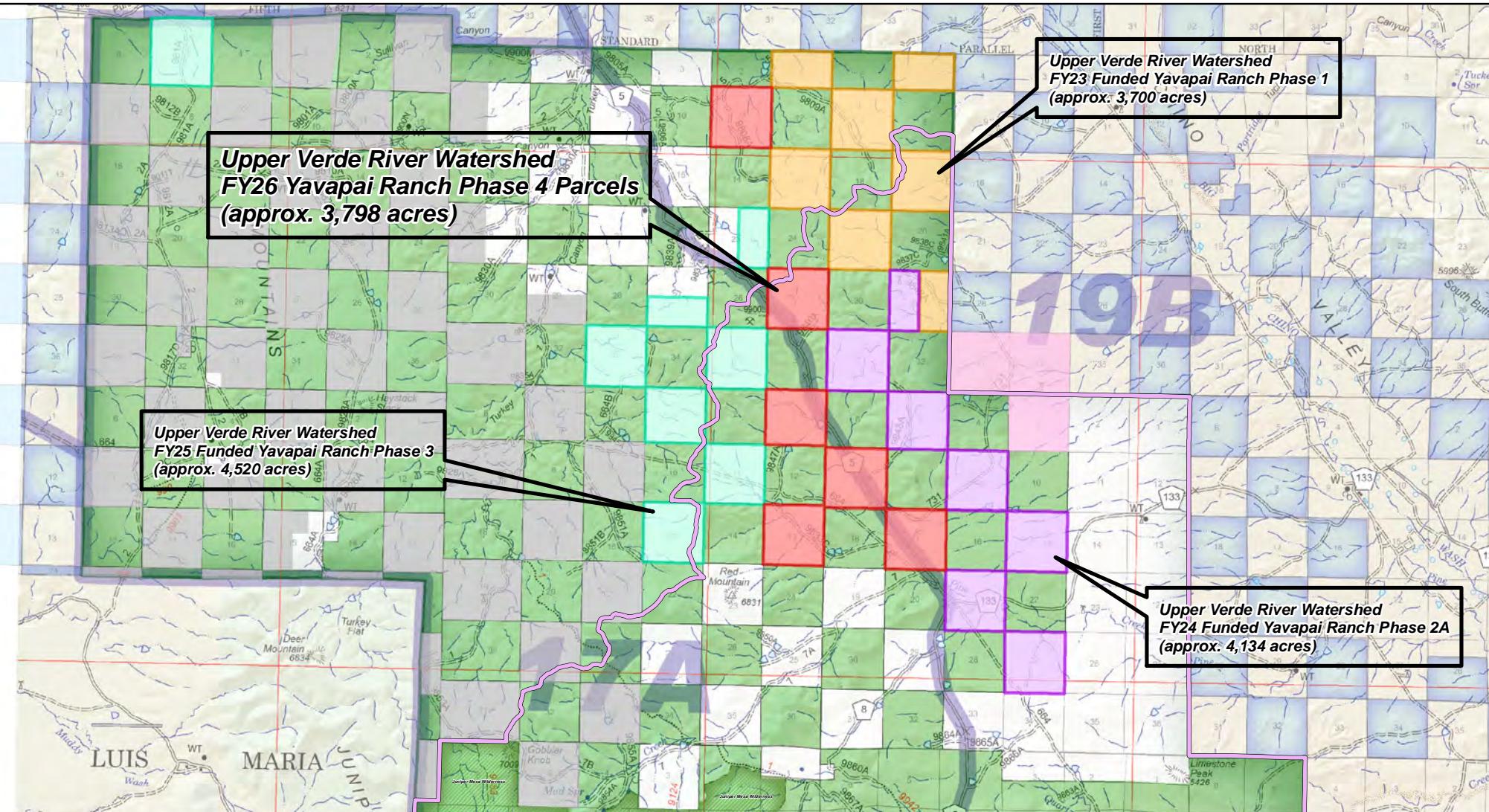
Public Benefits:

FOREST MANAGEMENT: This is the fourth phase of the Prescott National Forest's Yavapai Ranch project to increase recreation access. The project area is about 92,000 acres, with a checkerboard pattern of national forest land alternating with sections of privately-owned lands. Acquiring the Yavapai Ranch's privately-owned sections will facilitate more efficient agency management, reducing costs associated with cross-boundary ownership. The privately-owned sections total about 41,000 acres, which the Forest is acquiring in phases. This fourth phase of the project would secure permanent public access to 3,798 acres of the Ranch checkerboard. The Forest is negotiating with the landowner for further phases.

HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES: The project area is within a high-priority game management area for sportsmen to hunt elk, mule deer, antelope, and javelina. Mountain lions are also frequently hunted in this area between the months of August and May. For eight weeks during the year, the area is used by archery deer hunters. However, hunting in this area is at risk due to urban growth and a state law that prohibits gun use within a $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile of any residence. The area north of Phoenix, including Yavapai County, is experiencing significant population growth. In Yavapai County, owners are allowed to develop their land into 40-acre lots without further approval (and have the opportunity for smaller lot sizes). If not acquired, these private lands could be developed to include up to 25,000 lots. Development of the privately-owned parcels would essentially eliminate sportsmen's use of the 640-acre checkerboard sections of Forest lands as a result of the $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile prohibition.

WATERSHEDS: The total project area includes the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds – two important watersheds of the Colorado River Basin. Seasonal water flows over these lands and into the aquifer supplying water to 25 miles of river. Acquiring the Yavapai Ranch and managing it to keep the land and water healthy will benefit users who depend on that water. Over five million residents in metro Phoenix, 14 rural communities, and multiple Tribal Nations rely on the Verde River's downstream flows for drinking water, agricultural uses and more. The land also supports more than 200 bird species and 94 mammals and contains around 160 prehistoric native cultural sites, 90% of which would be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Support: Over 30 support letters received, including: Governor Katie Hobbs; Arizona Department of Game and Fish; two members of the Arizona legislature; Yavapai District Supervisor on the County Board of Supervisors; four local towns (Clarkdale, Camp Verde, Chino Valley, Prescott Valley); cities of Cottonwood and Prescott; Yavapai Prescott Indian Tribe; and sportsmen's groups including Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation (a group of 32 organizations), Arizona Antelope Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, and Arizona Elk Society.



State of Arizona Vicinity Map



References

Yavapai Ranch
(requesting party)
7528 N Clearwater Pkwy
Scottsdale, AZ 85253-2804

Disclaimer

The USDA Forest Service makes no warranty, expressed or implied regarding the data displayed on this map, and reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this information without notification.

Map Scale (1 : 150,000)

0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles

Legend

- Phase 4 Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 3,798 acres)
- Phase 3 Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 4,520 acres)
- Phase 2A Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 4,134 acres)
- Phase 1 Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 3,700 acres)

Other Layers

- Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 26,233 acres)
- non-subject Yavapai Ranch Parcels
- Chino Valley RD Landscape Restoration EA
- Planning Area boundary

Ownership Layers

- other private lands
- AZ State Land Department
- U.S. Forest Service / Prescott N.F.
- PNF Juniper Mesa Wilderness Area
- Prescott N.F. and/or County System Roads
- 1 - BASIC CUSTODIAL CARE (CLOSED)
- 2 - HIGH CLEARANCE VEHICLES
- 3 - SUITABLE FOR PASSENGER CARS
- 4 - MODERATE DEGREE OF USER COMFORT
- 5 - HIGH DEGREE OF USER COMFORT
- COUNTY OR STATE MAINTAINED ROADS

Upper Verde River Watershed - Yavapai Ranch Phase 4 FY2026 LWCF Nomination

LWCF Funding Proposal Map (LWCF 2026 Core Project Nomination)

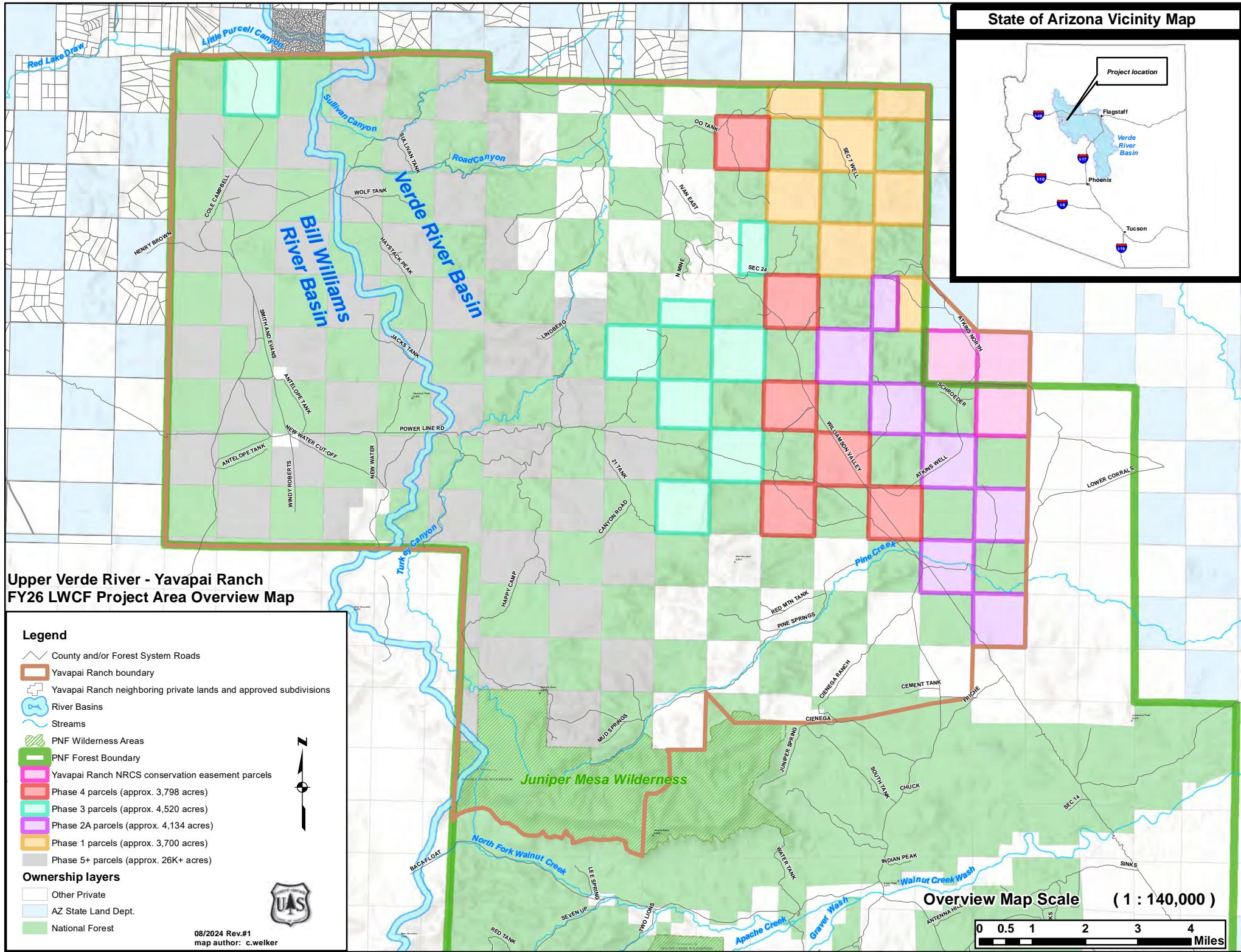
Phase 4: Approx. 3,798 acres located in:
Sections 7 and 17, T. 19 N., R. 5 W., &
Sections 1 and 13, T. 19 N., R. 6 W., &
Sections 11 and 25, T. 20 N., R. 6 W., G&SRM,
Yavapai County, AZ

U.S. Forest Service - Southwestern Region (R3)
Prescott National Forest
Arizona's 2nd U.S. Congressional District

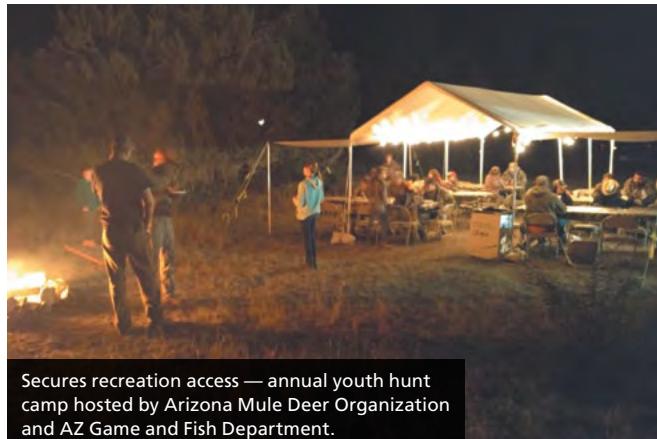
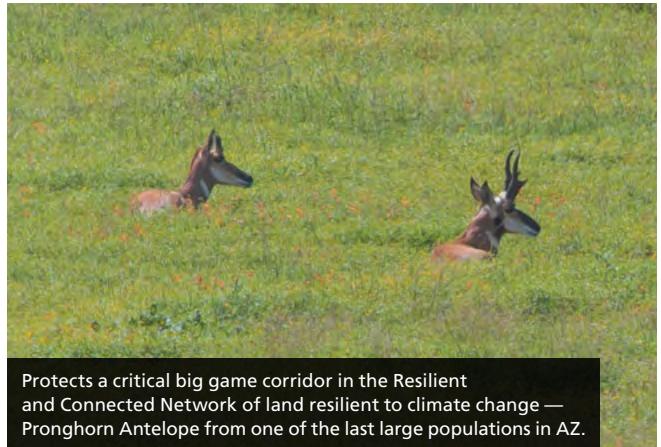


Copies of this map are available for public
inspection in the Office of the Regional Forester,
(R3 - Albuquerque, New Mexico)

State of Arizona Vicinity Map



YAVAPAI RANCH PHASE 4, LWCF FY26



**Letters of Support
Yavapai Ranch
FY26 LWCF Application**

Federal Government

- AZ Senators Kirsten Sinema and Mark Kelly

State Government

- Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs
- State Representative Quang Nguyen
- State Representative Selena Bliss
- Arizona Department of Game and Fish

Local Government

- Yavapai County Board of Supervisors
 - District 4 Supervisor Craig Brown
- Town of Clarkdale
- Town of Camp Verde
- City of Cottonwood
- Chino Valley
- Prescott Valley
- City of Prescott

Corporate

- Salt River Project

Nonprofit

- Arizona Antelope Foundation
- Verde River Institute
- Greater Chino Valley Collaborative
- Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Yavapai Trails Association
- Arizona Elk Society
- Friends of the Verde River
- Central Arizona Land Trust
- Mule Deer Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy
- Arizona Wildlife Federation
- Audubon Southwest
- Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
- Citizens Water Advisory Group

- Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Chapter

Other Supporting Parties

- Steve Pierce, Las Vegas Ranch private landowner



3131 S. Central Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85040

602.468.6470

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

Audubon Southwest, the regional office of Arizona and New Mexico part of the National Audubon Society (Audubon), strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2025 Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

Audubon protect birds, and the places they need, today and tomorrow through on-the-ground conservation, science, and policy. This endeavor would provide habitat connectivity, groundwater management, river protection, among other benefits. Audubon fully supports this request.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service (USFS) has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. It did not receive funding but this Phase IV request restores the project's original request, and, with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF—furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch—exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership—are private development and catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the

ranch have been working towards for more than 40 years. The landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds. Investments in this project from LWCF, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but harmonious Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project consolidates fragmented ownership and protects multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River – Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Help protect the Big Chino groundwater basin, as well as the upper Verde River.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the Lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native species.
6. Resolve fragmented ownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region, which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will help further reduce wildfire risk to natural resources and enhance mitigation efforts through ownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are all important to Audubon. We have Important Bird Areas throughout these landscapes. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards impactful conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 480-371-4778 or haley.paul@audubon.org.

Sincerely,

Haley Paul

Arizona Policy Director, Audubon Southwest

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



August 6, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Via email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Town of Prescott Valley strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde

River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Town of Prescott Valley. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at (928) 759-3100 or kpalguta@prescottvalley-az.gov .

Sincerely,



Mayor Kell Palguta
Prescott Valley, Arizona

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov

Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov

Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov

Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



Michael Mendonca, Senior Director
Water Strategic Services
PAB38W | P.O. Box 52025
Phoenix, AZ 85072-2025
P: (602) 236-8101
Michael.Mendonca@srpnet.com

August 26, 2024

Ms Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

On behalf of the Salt River Project (SRP), please accept this letter of support for Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire approximately 3,798 acres of the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

SRP operates the Salt River Federal Reclamation Project whose water supplies arise from the Salt River and Verde River watersheds. The primary purpose the PNF was established in the early 1900's was to maintain and enhance Verde River stream flows for capture and utilization for the Salt River Federal Reclamation Project. The consolidation of the Yavapai Ranch Phase IV acres within the PNF would further protect and enhance various land and water conservation values in the watershed and help sustain the underground water supply in the Big-Chino sub-basin, the headwaters of the Verde River.

The Big Chino sub-basin sits between the two non-adjacent units of the PNF. The aquifer beneath the Big Chino sub-basin is recharged by the runoff from PNF lands and from lands within the Yavapai Ranch Phase IV. For many years SRP has been involved in various watershed activities to protect the Big Chino Aquifer. This Phase IV acquisition will secure another six 640-acre sections within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands.

Flows from the 190-mile Verde River are a lifeblood for Arizona. Many downstream water users in the Verde Valley, multiple Native American Tribes, multiple National Forests, SRP shareholders and others have significant water rights to the Verde River and otherwise depend on the river for sustaining their economic well-being.

SRP is also a strong supporter of landscape scale forest restoration projects and believes the restoration of watershed function and natural vegetation conditions in Arizona's forests is critical to protecting Arizona's rivers, streams, and wildlife habitat from the devastating effects of wildfire. Having these Phase IV lands consolidated with other PNF lands will facilitate existing and approved high priority forest treatments that are crucial to maintaining the health and environmental quality of the Verde River. The acquisition will increase treatment effectiveness and reduce management costs due to a more consolidated land ownership pattern.

Thank you for considering the PNF application and supporting the land and water conservation values on the Verde River watershed. Should you have any questions concerning this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me at (602) 236-8101.

Sincerely,



Michael Mendonca
Senior Director, Water Strategic Services

MSM/lms

Cc: (via email only)
Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization
HReading@landadvisors.com

QUANG NGUYEN
1700 WEST WASHINGTON, SUITE H
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2844
CAPITOL PHONE: (602) 926-3258
TOLL FREE: 1-800-352-8404
qnguyen@azleg.gov



DISTRICT 1

Arizona House of Representatives Phoenix, Arizona 85007

August 2, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

I strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership – are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
APPROPRIATION
SUB-COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION
JUDICIARY,
Chairman
MILITARY AFFAIRS &
PUBLIC SAFETY

Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 602-926-3258 or qnguyen@azleg.gov.

Thank you,



Representative Quang Nguyen, LD1

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



August 8, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Submitted via email: michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land and Water Conservation Fund request by the Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Arizona Game and Fish Department would like to express support for the Fiscal Year 2026 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project submitted by the Prescott National Forest (Prescott NF). The mission of the Department is to conserve and protect Arizona's diverse fish and wildlife resources and manage for safe, compatible outdoor recreation opportunities for current and future generations.

The 52,000-acre Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest remaining private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The Department understands the USFS has initiated the first phases of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by including it in its FY 2025 budget to acquire an additional six sections of land within Yavapai Ranch.

The Department supports the continued commitment to this multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond. Phase IV LWCF acquisition would secure another six sections, approximately 3,800 acres, within a checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands.

Upon completion, the Yavapai Ranch LWCF acquisition project will result in the following expected conservation benefits, important to the Department's mission and our partners:

1. Consolidated resource protection and enhanced recreational access. Acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch in its entirety would consolidate over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River Watershed. Yavapai Ranch provides recreational access points to Juniper Mesa Wilderness and thousands of acres of adjacent forest, woodlands, and grasslands which are enjoyed by outdoor recreationists and hunters. This acquisition will help secure permanent public access and enhance efforts by the Prescott NF to expand recreational opportunities.

2. Protection of the Upper Verde River watershed. This project will contribute to protecting the Big Chino Aquifer and perennial flows in the upper Verde River. Perennial flows from the 190-mile Verde River provide important native fish and wildlife habitat in central Arizona. The Yavapai Ranch Phase IV LWCF acquisition will build upon ongoing multi-partner efforts and federal investments in habitat conservation in the Upper Verde River watershed.
3. Conservation of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in Arizona's Wildlife Conservation Strategy (AWCS) and Conservation of Wildlife Linkages. Arizona's Wildlife Conservation Strategy identifies strategies for conservation of SGCN, as well as strategies for conservation of important wildlife linkage movement corridors that maintain landscape scale connectivity and support conservation of important habitats. The Phase IV LWCF acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch includes multiple habitat types within the watershed, including forest, woodland, and grassland habitats associated with the Grand Canyon to Prescott Wildlife Corridor Complex, important for the conservation of all wildlife including SGCN species and several game species (mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope). It is also included in the Central Yavapai County Conservation Opportunity Area (COA). The proposed Phase IV acquisition will support the conservation of SGCN species and their habitats identified in Arizona's AWCS and contribute to protecting the habitats associated with this crucial wildlife linkage corridor.
4. Contribute to conserving the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River. The Bill Williams River is an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife and woodlands on the lower Colorado River.

Conserving important native fish and wildlife habitat in the Upper Verde and upper Bill Williams watersheds, protecting key wildlife migration corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are conservation priorities for the Department. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch LWCF Phase IV project would provide an important contribution towards these conservation outcomes. Feel free to contact Callie Cavalcant, the Habitat Evaluation and Lands Branch Chief, with any questions about the Department's support for this project at 623-236-7602 or ccavalcant@azgfd.gov.

Sincerely,



Clay Crowder, Assistant Director
Wildlife Management Division

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest sarah.clawson@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Region 3 Director, Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
tracy.parker@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest chris.welker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization hreading@landadvisors.com

SELINA BLISS
1700 WEST WASHINGTON, SUITE H
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2844
CAPITOL PHONE: (602) 926-4018
TOLL FREE: 1-800-352-8404
sbliss@azleg.gov

DISTRICT 1

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HEALTH & WELFARE,
Chairman
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
JUDICIARY,
Vice-Chairman



Arizona House of Representatives Phoenix, Arizona 85007

July 30th, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

I strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

I am grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish

public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are important to Legislative District 1. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 602-926-4018 or SBliss@azleg.gov.

Sincerely,



Representative Selina Bliss
District 1



August 14, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Transmitted via email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV)
Land and Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation (AZSFWC) is the leading 501c-3 non-profit organization in Arizona dedicated to wildlife conservation, habitat improvement, youth recruitment and retention, as well as providing educational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts on issues important to their passions. AZSFWC's member, affiliate, and associate groups reach across the spectrum of conservation, angling, hunting, shooting, outdoor recreation, and businesses from across Arizona. Our member groups alone represent over 28,500 people from Arizona.

AZSFWC has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for many years. We have also advocated and supported the **Prescott National Forest's (PNF) efforts in working with the Yavapai Ranch (Ranch) to transfer Ranch** holdings to the PNF for the benefit of wildlife, recreation, watershed, and management; effectively eliminating a significant amount of the public-private checkerboard that has existed for decades in Yavapai County, Arizona.

AZSFWC and 32 of our organizations (list attached) strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 LWCF request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV acquisition submitted by the PNF. The Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service (Forest).

AZSFWC appreciates that the Forest has initiated the first Phases of the Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in the FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in the budget for FY 2026.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections of land within the checkerboard of Ranch and PNF lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, the Forest did not receive the anticipated

AZSFWC Support for Yavapai Ranch Phase IV LWCF Grant Application – 8-14-24

Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation
PO Box 75731 New River, AZ 85087

Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget.

This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of the Ranch by PNF. This furthers the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and consolidates some of the fractured land ownership in the PNF.

The Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of the Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and catastrophic wildfire. If the Ranch were to be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish recreational access for the public and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate and manage the risk of catastrophic wildfire for the protection of both natural and cultural resources.

The new section added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. The protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities in this area of the PNF.

For over 40 years the Ranch owners and PNF have been working to consolidate the checkerboard land ownership. There is an immediate opportunity for the Forest to do just that, acquire 41,000 acres of the Ranch, and achieve the mutual goal of both parties. The **Ranch's principal owner has a desire to** complete this very important project with the Forest while he still has the controlling interest in the property.

If the PNF was able to acquire the Ranch in its entirety, the project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from LWCF, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Yavapai-Apache Nation will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

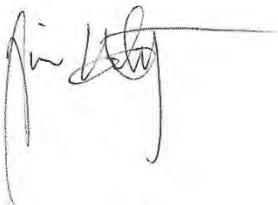
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River – Yavapai Ranch LWCF project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the Upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest **remaining inholding in the Forest's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with**

the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

AZSFWC believes all these conservation efforts are of critical importance as Arizona's population continues to grow and brings more development to the state. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from PNF for an additional allocation from the LWCF in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition!



Jim Unmacht
Executive Director

CC:

Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest

Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov

Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest

Chris.Welker@usda.gov

Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region

Tracy.Parker@usda.gov

Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization

HReading@landadvisors.com



AZSFWC Organizations Supporting the
Upper Verde Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) LWCF
Request from the Prescott National Forest

Anglers United
AZ Antelope Foundation
AZ Bass Nation
AZ Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
AZ Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation
AZ Chapter of Safari Club International
AZ Council of Trout Unlimited
AZ Deer Association
AZ Desert Bighorn Sheep Society
AZ Elk Society
AZ Flycasters Club
AZ Houndsmen's Association
AZ Mule Deer Organization
AZ Outdoor Adventures
AZ Outdoor Sports
AZ Predator Callers
Conservation First USA
Conserve and Protect AZ
Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge
Into the Wild Outdoors
Mogollon Sporting Association
Mule Deer Foundation
No Excuse Hunting and Outdoors
Outdoor Experience 4 All
Southern AZ Quail Forever
Southwest Wildlife Foundation
Valley of the Sun Quail Forever
SRT Outdoors
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife for Tomorrow
Wildlife Water Works
Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club

Arizona Wildlife Federation

P.O. Box 1182 Mesa, AZ 85211-1182
480-702-1365, www.azwildlife.org

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, and with the separate but synergistic Yavapai Apache Nation Land Exchange project, enables full acquisition of the eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF, thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF helps to consolidate ownership in this northeast corner, adding to the contiguous area of habitat and enhancing public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the

Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from LWCF, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Yavapai Apache Nation will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native species.
6. Resolve fragmented ownership and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region in order to align with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk mitigation efforts through ownership consolidation and increased forest treatment effectiveness.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Arizona Wildlife Federation. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. If you have any questions about our support for the project feel free to contact our Region 3 Director Loyd Barnett at 928-284-0161 or region3director@azwildlife.org.

Thank you,

Loyd Barnett
Region 3 Director

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

August 12, 2024

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Central Arizona Land Trust strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another six sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted five of these six sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch - exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and



the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River - Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Central Arizona Land Trust. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-925-5425 or (beckyruffner@gmail.com).

Thank you,



Rebecca Ruffner, President

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization
HReading@landadvisors.com





Town of Clarkdale
Post Office Box 308
Clarkdale, AZ 86324
Telephone: (928) 639-2400

August 13, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Town of Clarkdale strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another six sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted five of these six sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus **restores the project's original momentum, and with the** addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch

have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding **in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority** WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Town of Clarkdale. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-639-2432 or **Robyn.Prud'homme-Bauer@clarkdale.az.gov**.

Thank you,

DocuSigned by:

Robyn Prud'homme-Bauer

8929FEE8DC34438...

Robyn Prud'homme-Bauer
Mayor – Town of Clarkdale

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization
HReading@landadvisors.com



Office of the City Manager

Dallin Kimble, City Manager
201 N. Montezuma St. Ste. 302
Prescott, Arizona 86303
928-777-1435

August 26, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The City of Prescott strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

As you might know, the City of Prescott has had a long history within the Big Chino subbasin. By the early 1980's the Arizona Department of Water Resources had allocated Central Arizona water rights to various communities in Arizona, including the City of Prescott and the Yavapai- Prescott Indian Tribe. Although the Central Arizona Project canal was constructed to deliver water to the Phoenix and Tucson areas, the CAP was never intended to deliver water directly to communities in Central and Northern Arizona. Rather, the plan was for these communities, including Prescott, to draw their water directly out of the Verde River and exchange CAP allocations to one of the downstream users of Verde River water.

As concerns about possible impacts to the Upper Verde River by this type of exchange grew, the City realized that this type of exchange was not feasible for the City. Instead, the City entered into an agreement to convey its CAP M&I Subcontract allocation to the City of Scottsdale while also entering into a comprehensive water settlement agreement with the Yavapai-Apache Indian Tribe. In exchange, the City was granted the right, through legislation, to withdraw groundwater from the Big Chino subbasin for the protection and long-term safe yield goals of the Prescott Active Management Area.

To accomplish that exchange, the City partnered with the Town of Prescott Valley to purchase the Big Chino Water Ranch, which is approximately 20 miles upstream from the Upper Verde River headwaters, and downstream (and down groundwater gradient) from Yavapai Ranch. The City acquired this historically irrigated property for the specific purpose of reducing any impact to the Verde River as a result of the City's groundwater withdrawals. The City has already explored opportunities to establish conservation easements on other parts of the Big Chino groundwater subbasin and, for its part, the City has already retired approximately 3,600 acre-feet/year of agricultural water use from the lands that it owns within the Big Chino Water Ranch.

Over the last several decades, the City has conducted extensive research and modeling effort required to support the inclusion of the Big Chino water supply into the City's Designation of Assured Water Supply through the Arizona Department of Water Resources. Since 2010 the City of Prescott, Town of Prescott Valley, and the Salt River Project have worked together to establish a conceptual framework to achieve the parties' mutual interest related to the withdrawal and use of water from the Big Chino subbasin and protection of the stream flow in the Upper Verde River. These efforts have led to development of an extensive surface/groundwater monitoring system within the Upper Verde River which has generated data to support and prepare a much more refined groundwater model than was previously available. In 2017, groundwater modeling formally began and continues to this day.

As monitoring and modeling efforts move to a close, the next step will be an agreement between the parties to move into preparation of future condition scenarios and possible mitigation phase of the project. With a completed groundwater model that all parties agree adequately describes the hydrologic conditions of the basin, mitigation strategies if needed will be developed based on impacts from all water demands from the Big Chino subbasin including agricultural use, registered wells, future City importation, and projected development use.

The acquisition of lands within the Yavapai Ranch can be part of the basis of a comprehensive plan to manage the Big Chino aquifer with regards to all existing and future uses and create a focused conservation plan that meets the watershed needs. Based on the extensive work described above, the City certainly supports efforts by the US Forest Service to preserve existing wilderness land in the Yavapai Ranch and to further protect the Big Chino aquifer. Otherwise, development of the Yavapai Ranch would diminish the efforts we have made to balance the water needs of the Prescott Active Management Area, the ecosystem of the Verde River, and the downstream water users in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

To that end we are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies, including the City of Prescott's interest in the Big Chino Water Ranch.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the City of Prescott. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-777-1435 or dallin.kimble@prescott-az.gov.

Thank you,



Dallin Kimble
City Manager

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization
HReading@landadvisors.com



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
824 N. Main St.
Cottonwood, AZ. 86326

August 14, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The City of Cottonwood strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.



There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the City of Cottonwood. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at (928) 340-2725 or telinski@cottonwoodaz.gov.

Thank you,

Tim Elinski, Mayor
City of Cottonwood

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

August 27, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

Founded in 2002, the Citizens Water Advocacy Group is a local science-based citizens group dedicated to working for a sustainable water future for the Prescott Active Management Area and to protecting the upper Verde River.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured land ownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also could significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured land ownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch

have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for many citizens. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project.

For the CWAG Board of Directors



1219 Granite Creek Lane
Chino Valley, AZ 86323
gbverde99@gmail.com

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov; Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov; Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

**YAVAPAI COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**



**Craig L. Brown, Chairman
Supervisor, District 4**

July 24, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

As Chairman of the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors, I strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for Yavapai County from my perspective. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project.

Sincerely,



Craig J. Brown, Chairman
Yavapai County Board of Supervisors

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

August 16, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

Mule Deer Foundation strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache

Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for Mule Deer Foundation. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 501-887-6162 or jschmaedick@muledeer.org.

Thank you,

Joe Schmaedick
Regional Conservation Coordinator-AZ/NM
Mule Deer Foundation

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



ARIZONA ELK SOCIETY

ARIZONA ELK SOCIETY • 7773 W. GOLDEN LANE, PEORIA, AZ 85345 • 623-444-4147

August 12th, 2024

Ms. Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

I am writing to express The Arizona Elk Society's support for the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project. This critical initiative aligns closely with our organization's mission to conserve Arizona's wildlife habitats and enhance public recreational access.

Yavapai Ranch, located in Yavapai County, Arizona, is the largest private in-holding within the U.S. Forest Service's Southwestern Region. We commend the Prescott National Forest for its efforts in the ongoing, multi-phase acquisition of this significant landscape. The Phase IV request is particularly important as it builds upon the momentum of previous phases and brings us closer to the full potential of this conservation project. We are encouraged by the U.S. Forest Service's prioritization of Phase III, which was elevated to #4 in the national ranking and included in the FY 2025 budget. We urge your continued commitment to this project as it progresses into FY 2026.

The Phase IV LWCF acquisition proposal aims to secure six additional sections, each approximately 640 acres, within a checkerboard pattern of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. Although five of these sections were previously ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list, the necessary funding was not included in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request is essential to restoring the project's momentum and, with the inclusion of a new section, will enable the full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF. Such a consolidation would greatly enhance landscape-scale resource protection and simplify land management in this ecologically sensitive area.

Yavapai Ranch is located just 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. Development pressures, combined with the checkerboard pattern of land ownership, pose significant risks to the area's water resources, wildlife habitats, and public recreational access. The new section added to the Phase IV request, which is bisected by Williamson Valley Road, is particularly vulnerable to development. Securing this land not only prevents development but also significantly enhances public access and recreational opportunities in the region.

There is a unique opportunity for the U.S. Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch, fulfilling a longstanding goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the ranch's family have pursued for over four decades. Successfully acquiring Yavapai Ranch in its entirety would resolve significant management and access challenges, consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land within the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds. This acquisition would also contribute to the protection of the lower Colorado River basin and support the broader conservation



ARIZONA ELK SOCIETY

ARIZONA ELK SOCIETY • 7773 W. GOLDEN LANE, PEORIA, AZ 85345 • 623-444-4147

efforts spearheaded by the LWCF, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River – Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Improve recreational access and consolidate resource protection across more than 92,000 acres.
2. Help protect the Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and critical state water supplies.
3. Support downstream conservation efforts along the Verde River.
4. Safeguard the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, a key tributary to the Colorado River, which supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Preserve vital habitats within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for pronghorn antelope, elk, mule deer, and various grassland obligate birds and wildlife.
6. Resolve the fragmented landownership pattern by acquiring the largest remaining in-holding in the U.S. Forest Service's Southwestern Region, directly supporting the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS). The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquiring Yavapai Ranch will further reduce wildfire risk and enhance landscape-scale restoration efforts.

The Arizona Elk Society is dedicated to conserving Arizona's wildlife habitats, mitigating wildfire risks, and enhancing public access to natural areas. The Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project is a critical step towards achieving these goals, and we strongly urge your support for the Prescott National Forest's LWCF request in FY 2026.

Please feel free to contact me if you require additional information or have any questions at (623) 444-4147 or Stevec@arizonaelsociety.org

Thank you,
Steve Clark

Executive Director



August 14, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

RE: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's (RMEF) mission, supported by more than 6,000 members in Arizona and 233,000 members nationwide, is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. RMEF strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. The acquisition will protect working ranchlands and important wildlife habitat, enhance wildlife movement connectivity, and protect groundwater resources.

Specifically, the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Protect the upper Verde River and state water supplies.
3. Protect the Big Chino aquifer, a primary water source in the region and a critical component of the Verde River base flow.
4. Contribute to downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, and numerous other non-game wildlife species.
6. Contribute to wildfire risk mitigation efforts through ownership consolidation and increased forest treatment effectiveness.

Please contact Rob Andress, RMEF's Southwest Lands Program Manager at (928) 499-9620 or randress@rmef.org for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Andress".

Robert J. Andress
Southwest Lands Program Manager

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0309

August 19, 2024

Regional Forester
Michiko Martin
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

We write regarding the Prescott National Forest's FY26 Land and Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project. Yavapai Ranch is the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service has already shown strong commitment to this multi-phase project by initiating Phase I and prioritizing Phase III, which was moved up to #4 in national ranking and included in the FY25 budget.

The Phase IV acquisition will secure six additional sections, each approximately 640 acres, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The Prescott National Forest (PNF) previously submitted five of these six sections for LWCF funding in FY24 and they were ranked at #5 on the FY24 USFS Supplemental Project List. Ultimately, Forest Service did not receive the supplemental funding. The PNF's current application aims to restore the project's original momentum and adds one new section of land. This would complete the acquisition of the eastern third of Yavapai Ranch, furthering landscape-scale resource protection and consolidating fractured landownership.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The primary threats to Yavapai Ranch's water, wildlife, and recreational values stem from private development and the risk of catastrophic wildfires. If developed instead of conserved, Yavapai Ranch could become fragmented, significantly reducing public recreational access and complicating the Prescott National Forest's efforts to manage wildfire risks to natural and cultural resources. The Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project will safeguard Arizona communities from wildfire threats, enhance recreational access, consolidate resource protection, and preserve water resources and habitats.

In accordance with all existing agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines, we respectfully ask that you give this proposal full and fair consideration as you make this important funding decision. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Grand Canyon Chapter • 514 W. Roosevelt St. • Phoenix, AZ 85003
Phone: (602) 253-8633 • Email: grand.canyon.chapter@sierraclub.org

August 27, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin:

The Sierra Club, founded in 1892, is a national nonprofit organization of approximately 2.7 million members and supporters dedicated to exploring, enjoying, and protecting the wild places of the earth; to practicing and promoting the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educating and enlisting humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to using all lawful means to carry out these objectives. Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter was organized in 1965, and, prior to that our members were also involved in protecting Arizona's resources.

The Yavapai Group is the Prescott region group of the Sierra Club and is part of the Grand Canyon Chapter. We have a long-standing interest in Prescott National Forest. We have participated in the forest planning process. Our 800 local members have long enjoyed the forest for hiking, trail riding, hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, and more. We conduct service projects in the forest and our members and volunteers are deeply concerned for the future. We have a significant interest in protecting and restoring the water quality in Arizona's rivers, lakes, and streams and in protecting the health of the forest and wildlife. It is within that context that we are submitting these comments.

The Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter and Yavapai Group strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional

LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Yavapai Group of the Sierra Club. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact us with any questions about support for the project.

Sincerely,



Gary Beverly, PhD
Chair, Sierra Club - Yavapai Group
1219 Granite Creek Lane
Chino Valley, AZ 86323
928-308-1003 (c)
gbverde99@gmail.com



Sandy Bahr
Chapter Director
Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter
sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov; Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov; Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

From: [Steve Pierce](#)
To: [Heather Reading](#)
Subject: Fwd: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest
Date: Friday, August 30, 2024 10:26:00 AM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Steve Pierce <lvranch1@earthlink.net>
Subject: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest
Date: August 30, 2024 at 9:40:34 AM MST
To: Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

August 28, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

We at Las Vegas Ranch strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley, and only 20 miles from our headquarters.. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.

3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North

America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.

6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Pierce family that own Las Vegas Ranch for the past 66 years. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-713-9390 or my personal email lvranch1@earthlink.net.

Thank you,

Senator Steve M Pierce
Az State Senate 2009-2016

August 20, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Verde River Institute strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache

Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River watershed, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Verde River Institute. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-300-6603 or doug@verderiverinstitute.org.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Doug" or a similar name.

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

August 26, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

Greater Chino Valley Collaborative (GCVC) strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache

Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Greater Chino Valley Collaborative. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at (208)691-8043 or carrie@swdresources.com.

Thank you,

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

August 13, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Nature Conservancy strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership – are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

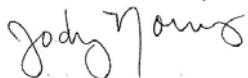
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for The Nature Conservancy. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

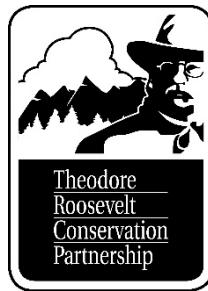
Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition.

Thank you,



Jody Norris
Land & Water Protection Director, The Nature Conservancy in Arizona

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



August 15, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service. TRCP is a national non-profit conservation organization working to guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish. We work with 62 formal partner organizations and businesses, and we represent over 137,000 members nationally, including over 2,000 members in the state of Arizona.

TRCP is grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access, important habitat for big game species, and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
2. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
3. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
4. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
5. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for TRCP and the hunting and fishing communities in Arizona. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 505-441-0126 or mgaztambide@trcp.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcel Gatzambide
Southwest Field Manager
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



Arizona Antelope Foundation

PO Box 1191, Mesa, AZ 85211 www.azantelope.org

August 16, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The **Arizona Antelope Foundation**, a non-governmental wildlife conservation organization, strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important Phase I of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has followed through with approving phase II, which resulted in the total acquisition of approximately 11,000 acres of private land within a checkerboard of National Service lands. Unfortunately, Phase III submitted for FY 2025 funding could not be completed since Supplemental Project funding was not secured. We request your continued commitment to this critical multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another estimated 3,840 acres within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership – are private development and catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting habitat fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to manage this important block of land for approved multiple uses. Efforts by the USFS to mitigate the risk of future catastrophic wildfire would be hindered with checkerboard ownership.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch

have been working towards for over 40 years. The elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from LWCF, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Yavapai-Apache Nation will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native species.
6. Resolve fragmented ownership and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region to align with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk mitigation efforts through ownership consolidation and increased forest treatment effectiveness.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, enhancing public recreational access, retaining landscaped-sized grasslands with associated wildlife movement corridors, and managing viable pronghorn antelope populations are top priorities for the Arizona Antelope Foundation. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at (602) 309-3663 or dakotasoo@aol.com.

Thank you,

Terry Schupp

Terry Schupp, President
Arizona Antelope Foundation

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Region 3 Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com

Office of the Mayor



CHINO VALLEY

ARIZONA

Jack Miller, Mayor

jwmiller@chinoaz.net

August 13, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Town of Chino Valley strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Chino Valley, Prescott, and Prescott Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership – are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern-day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this

very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access valuable outcomes beneficial to the Town of Chino Valley and its residents. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at (928) 636-2646 or jmiller@chinoaz.net.

Thank you,



Jack W. Miller
Mayor

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



KATIE HOBBS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF ARIZONA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

August 7, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Via email: Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin:

I strongly support the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

I am grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership – are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for my administration. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition.

Sincerely,



Katie Hobbs
Governor
State of Arizona

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest
Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region
Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization
HReading@landadvisors.com

August 1, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
By email - Michiko.Martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase IV) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

Yavapai Trails Association strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phase of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by moving it up to #4 in national ranking and including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase IV LWCF acquisition will secure another 6 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section, within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands. The PNF previously submitted 5 of these 6 sections for LWCF funding in FY 2024 and they were ranked #5 nationally on the FY 2024 USFS Supplemental project list. However, USFS did not receive the anticipated Supplemental Project funding for those additional LWCF acquisition projects in the 2024 budget. This Phase IV request thus restores the project's original momentum, and with the addition of one new section, enables full acquisition of the entire eastern third of Yavapai Ranch by PNF thus furthering the goal of landscape-scale resource protection and fractured landownership consolidation.

Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and risk of catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire to natural and cultural resources and modern day values at risk. The new section that has been added to the Phase IV LWCF request is especially at risk of development because it is bisected by Williamson Valley Road. Protection of this section not only eliminates the risk of development but also looks to significantly enhance public access and recreation opportunities across the fractured landownership pattern.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from the LWCF board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the separate but synergistic Yavapai-Apache

Nation Land Exchange project will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.
6. Resolve a highly fragmented landownership pattern and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region which directly aligns with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority WCS landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk to resources and enhance mitigation efforts through landownership consolidation and greatly increase the effectiveness of landscape scale restoration activities.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for Yavapai Trails Association. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase IV project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase IV of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 602-481-2617 or yavapai.trails@gmail.com.

Thank you,



Lisa L Lafoon, President
Yavapai Trails Association
www.yavapai-trails.org

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest Chris.Welker@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com



Y A V A P A I

PREScott • INDIAN • TRIBE

September 13, 2024

Michiko Martin
Regional Forester
US Forest Service Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

By email - michiko.martin@usda.gov

Re: Support for the Upper Verde River Watershed-Yavapai Ranch (Phase III) Land & Water Conservation Fund request by Prescott National Forest

Dear Regional Forester Martin,

The Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe strongly supports the Fiscal Year 2026 Land & Water Conservation Fund request for the Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase III submitted by the Prescott National Forest (PNF) to acquire land within the historic Yavapai Ranch in Yavapai County, Arizona. Yavapai Ranch comprises the largest private in-holding in the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service.

We are grateful that the US Forest Service has initiated the important first phases of Yavapai Ranch acquisition and has prioritized Phase III of the project by including it in its FY 2025 budget. We request your continued commitment to this outstanding multi-phase conservation and recreation project in FY 2026 and beyond.

This Phase III LWCF acquisition will secure another 7 sections, roughly at 640-acres per section within the checkerboard of privately-owned and National Forest System lands located 40 miles from the rapidly growing communities of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The greatest threat to the water, wildlife, and recreation values of Yavapai Ranch – exacerbated by the checkerboard pattern of land ownership - are private development and catastrophic wildfire. Should Yavapai Ranch be developed rather than conserved, the resulting fragmentation would significantly diminish public recreational access and complicate efforts by PNF to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect natural and cultural resources.

There is an immediate opportunity for the US Forest Service to acquire 41,000 acres of Yavapai Ranch and achieve the mutual goal of consolidated ownership that PNF and the family that owns the ranch have been working towards for over 40 years. The now elderly landowner is hoping to complete this very important project with the Forest Service while he has the controlling interest in the property. If acquired by PNF in its entirety, the Yavapai Ranch project would resolve management and access issues by consolidating over 92,000 acres of permanently conserved land in the Upper Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, and ultimately also serve to protect the lower Colorado River basin. Investments in this project from LWCF, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Yavapai Apache Nation will further consolidate fragmented ownership and protect multiple natural and cultural resource values.

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

1. Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
2. Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
3. Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
4. Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
5. Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native species.
6. Resolve fragmented ownership and acquire the largest remaining inholding in the US Forest Service's Southwestern Region in order to align with the nation's Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) emphasis. The PNF has been identified as one of the nation's top priority landscapes, and acquisition of the Yavapai Ranch will only help to further reduce wildfire risk mitigation efforts through ownership consolidation and increased forest treatment effectiveness.

Conserving the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds, mitigating wildfire risk, protecting resilient wildlife movement corridors, and enhancing public recreational access are top priorities for the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe. The proposed Upper Verde River Watershed – Yavapai Ranch Phase III project provides an important contribution towards those conservation outcomes.

Thank you for considering the request from Prescott National Forest for an additional allocation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY 2026 for Phase III of this important acquisition. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about support for the project at 928-445-8790 or bogo@ypit.com.

Thank you,



Robert Ogo, President
Tribal Board of Directors

cc: Dale Deiter, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest dale.deiter@usda.gov
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region Tracy.Parker@usda.gov
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization HReading@landadvisors.com