

## Arizona: Prescott National Forest

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

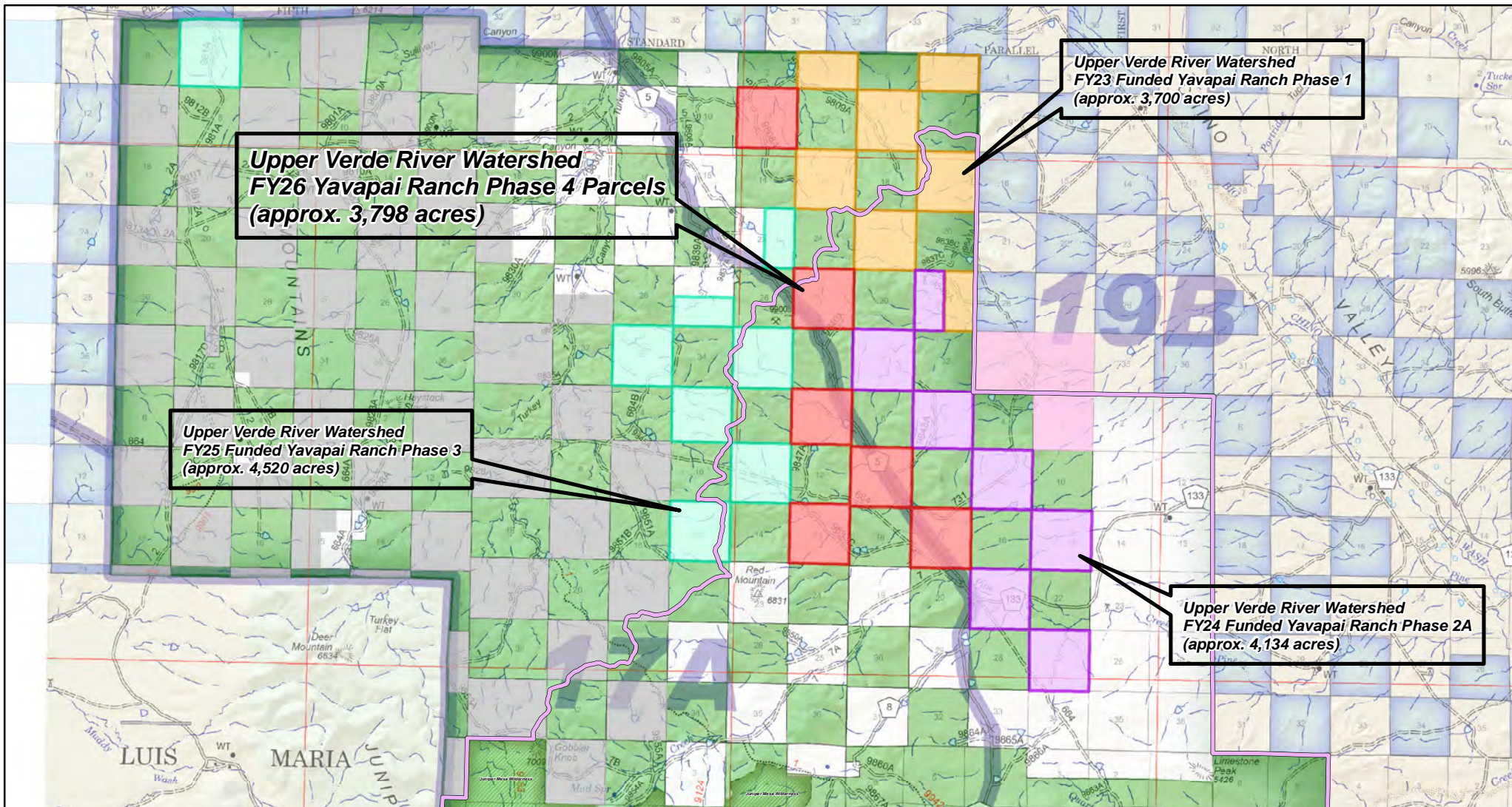
**FOREST MANAGEMENT:** This is the fourth phase of the Prescott National Forest's Yavapai Ranch project to increase recreation access. The project area is about 92,000 acres, with a checkerboard pattern of national forest land alternating with sections of privately-owned lands. Acquiring the Yavapai 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 ¼-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 ¼-mile prohibition.

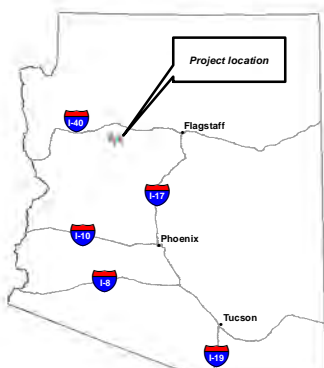
**WATERSHEDS:** The total project area includes the Verde River and Bill Williams River watersheds – two important watersheds of the Colorado River Basin. Seasonal water flows over these lands and into the aquifer supplying water to 25 miles of river. Acquiring the Yavapai Ranch and managing it to keep 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**
- Phase 5+ Yavapai Ranch "Checkerboard" Parcels (approx. 26,233 acres)
  - non-subject Yavapai Ranch Parcels
  - NRCS/TNC Funded AECF (approx. 1,920 acres)
  - 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

08/2024  
Rev.# 1

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

#### LWCF Funding Proposal Map (LWCF 2026 Core Project Nomination)

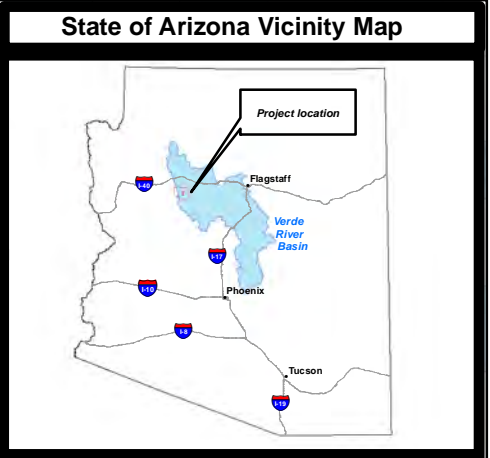
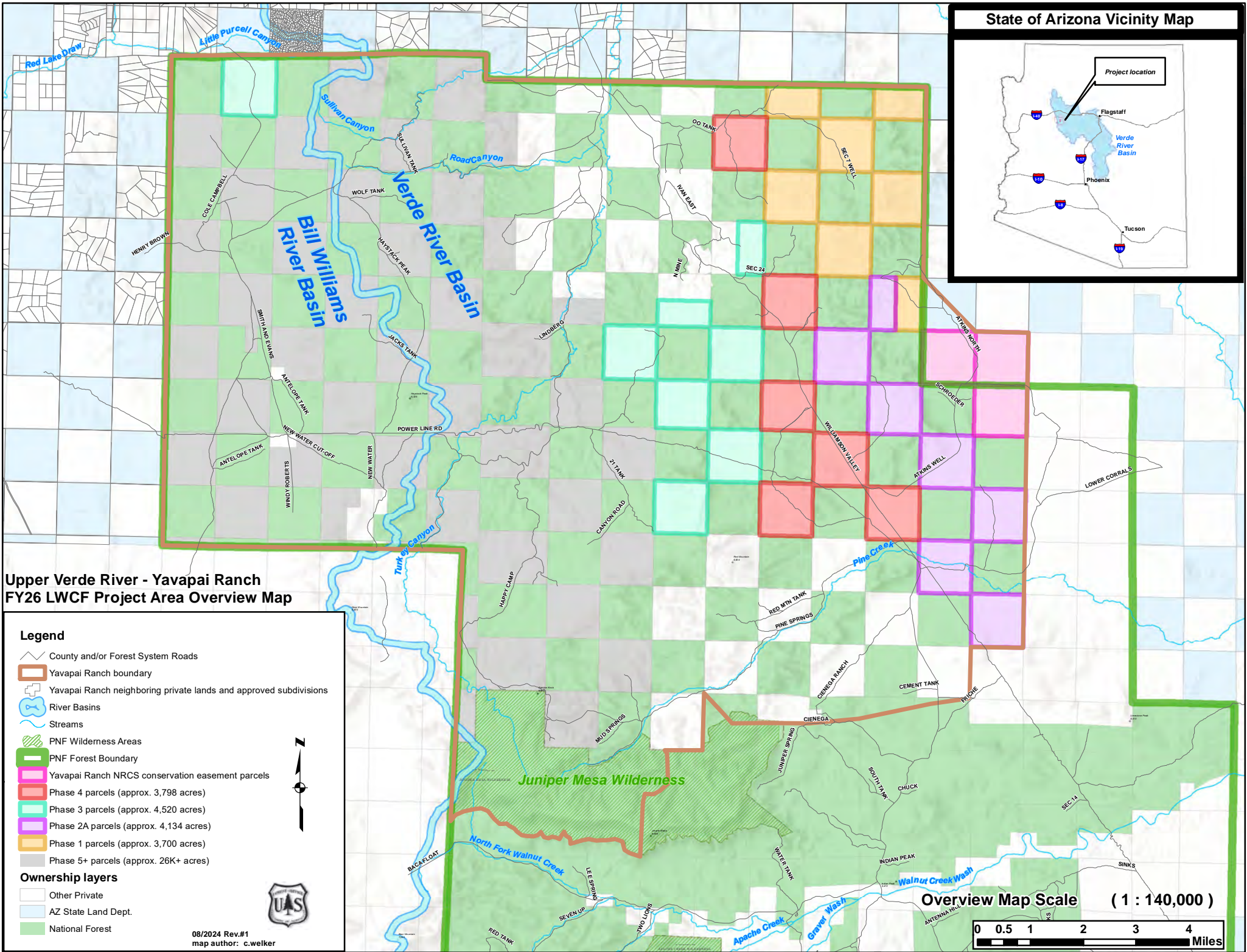
Phase 4: Approx. 3,798 acres located in:  
Sections 7 and 17, T. 19 N., R. 5 W., &  
Sections 1 and 13, T. 19 N., R. 6 W., &  
Sections 11 and 25, T. 20 N., R. 6 W., G&SRM,  
Yavapai County, AZ

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)





Upper Verde River - Yavapai Ranch  
FY26 LWCF Project Area Overview Map

**Legend**

- County and/or Forest System Roads
- Yavapai Ranch boundary
- Yavapai Ranch neighboring private lands and approved subdivisions
- River Basins
- Streams
- PNF Wilderness Areas
- PNF Forest Boundary
- Yavapai Ranch NRCS conservation easement parcels
- Phase 4 parcels (approx. 3,798 acres)
- Phase 3 parcels (approx. 4,520 acres)
- Phase 2A parcels (approx. 4,134 acres)
- Phase 1 parcels (approx. 3,700 acres)
- Phase 5+ parcels (approx. 26K+ acres)

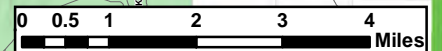
**Ownership layers**

- Other Private
- AZ State Land Dept.
- National Forest



08/2024 Rev.#1  
map author: c.welker

Overview Map Scale ( 1 : 140,000 )



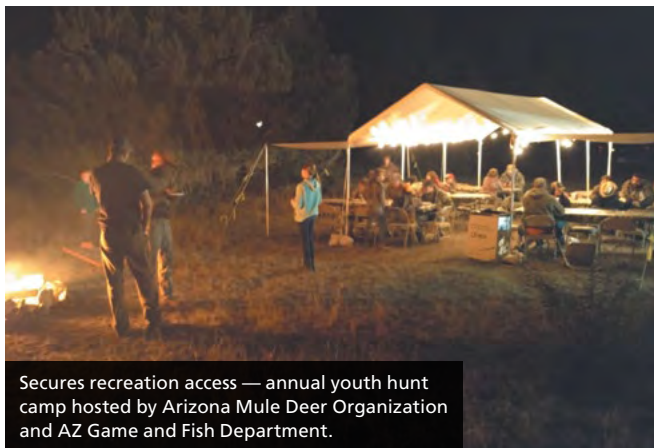




Protects the Upper Verde River and state water supplies — seasonal water flowing into grasslands over the aquifer that supplies flow to 25 miles of river.



Protects a critical big game corridor in the Resilient and Connected Network of land resilient to climate change — Pronghorn Antelope from one of the last large populations in AZ.



Secures recreation access — annual youth hunt camp hosted by Arizona Mule Deer Organization and AZ Game and Fish Department.



Prescott National Forest©



Arizona Mule Deer Organization



Secures 3,798 acres of the largest inholding in USFS Southwestern Region — ranch land in checkerboard private and public ownership.

**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



Michiko Martin  
Regional Forester  
US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
By email - [michiko.martin@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto:haley.paul@audubon.org).

Sincerely,

*Haley Paul*

Arizona Policy Director, Audubon Southwest

cc: Sarah Clawson, Forest Supervisor, Prescott National Forest [Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov](mailto:Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov)  
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest [Chris.Welker@usda.gov](mailto:Chris.Welker@usda.gov)  
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region [Tracy.Parker@usda.gov](mailto:Tracy.Parker@usda.gov)  
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization [HReading@landadvisors.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:kpalguta@prescottvalley-az.gov).

Sincerely,



Mayor Kell Palguta  
Prescott Valley, Arizona

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



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

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](mailto: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

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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:

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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](mailto:qnguyen@azleg.gov).

Thank you,



Representative Quang Nguyen, LD1

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

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**azgfd.gov | 602.942.3000**

**5000 W. CAREFREE HIGHWAY, PHOENIX AZ 85086**

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JAMES E. GOUGHNOUR, PAYSON | TODD G. GEILER, PRESCOTT **DIRECTOR:** TY E. GRAY **DEPUTY DIRECTOR:** TOM P. FINLEY

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](mailto:ccavalcant@azgfd.gov).

Sincerely,



Clay Crowder, Assistant Director  
Wildlife Management Division

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

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DISTRICT 1



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Chairman  
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
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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](mailto: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](mailto: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**

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



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](mailto:Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov)

Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest

[Chris.Welker@usda.gov](mailto:Chris.Welker@usda.gov)

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

[Tracy.Parker@usda.gov](mailto:Tracy.Parker@usda.gov)

Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization

[HReading@landadvisors.com](mailto: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

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

# Arizona Wildlife Federation

P.O. Box 1182 Mesa, AZ 85211-1182  
480-702-1365, [www.azwildlife.org](http://www.azwildlife.org)

Michiko Martin  
Regional Forester  
US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
By email - [michiko.martin@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto:region3director@azwildlife.org).

Thank you,

Loyd Barnett  
Region 3 Director

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



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RICHARD YETMAN

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Michiko Martin  
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US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
By email - [Michiko.Martin@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto:beckyruffner@gmail.com)).

Thank you,



Rebecca Ruffner, President

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



## Office of the City Manager

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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](mailto: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](mailto:dallin.kimble@prescott-az.gov).

Thank you,



Dallin Kimble  
City Manager

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

# THE CITY OF COTTONWOOD



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](mailto: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.



## THE CITY OF COTTONWOOD



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](mailto:telinski@cottonwoodaz.gov).

Thank you,

Tim Elinski, Mayor  
City of Cottonwood

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

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(928) 771-3207    [craig.brown@yavapaiaz.gov](mailto:craig.brown@yavapaiaz.gov)  
1015 Fair Street Prescott, AZ 86305



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 L. Brown, Chairman  
Yavapai County Board of Supervisors

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

(928) 771-3207    [craig.brown@yavapaiaz.gov](mailto:craig.brown@yavapaiaz.gov)  
1015 Fair Street Prescott, AZ 86305

August 16, 2024

Michiko Martin  
Regional Forester  
US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
By email - [Michiko.Martin@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov)  
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest [Chris.Welker@usda.gov](mailto:Chris.Welker@usda.gov)  
Tracy Parker, Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region [Tracy.Parker@usda.gov](mailto:Tracy.Parker@usda.gov)  
Heather Reading, Conservation Advisor, Land Advisors Organization [HReading@landadvisors.com](mailto: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@arizonaelksociety.org](mailto:SteveC@arizonaelksociety.org)

Thank you,  
Steve Clark

Executive Director



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
ELK FOUNDATION**

August 14, 2024

Michiko Martin  
Regional Forester  
US Forest Service Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
By email - [michiko.martin@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto:randress@rmef.org) for additional information.

Sincerely,

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.

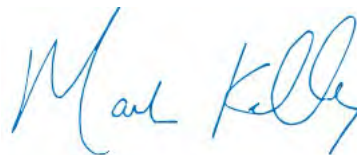
Yavapai Ranch is located 40 miles from of Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The primary threats to Yavapai Ranch's water, wildlife, and recreational values stem from private development and the risk of catastrophic wildfires. If developed instead of conserved, Yavapai Ranch could become fragmented, 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





**SIERRA  
CLUB**

**Grand Canyon Chapter • 514 W. Roosevelt St. • Phoenix, AZ 85003**  
Phone: (602) 253-8633 • Email: [grand.canyon.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:gbverde99@gmail.com)



Sandy Bahr  
Chapter Director  
Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter  
[sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org](mailto:sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org)

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

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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](mailto: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.
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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 [lv ranch1@earthlink.net](mailto:lv ranch1@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](mailto: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](mailto:doug@verderiverinstitute.org).

Thank you,



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

Thank you,

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

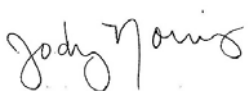
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

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.

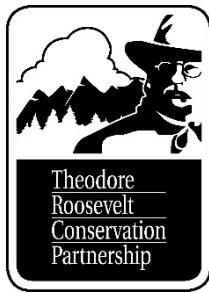
Thank you,



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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Marcel Gaztambide  
Southwest Field Manager  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

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



# **Arizona Antelope Foundation**

**PO Box 1191, Mesa, AZ 85211 [www.azantelope.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Sarah.Clawson@usda.gov)  
Tracy Parker, Region 3 Director of Lands and Minerals, USFS Southwestern Region  
[Tracy.Parker@usda.gov](mailto:Tracy.Parker@usda.gov)  
Chris Welker, Realty Specialist, Prescott National Forest [Chris.Welker@usda.gov](mailto:Chris.Welker@usda.gov)  
Heather Reading, Land Advisors Organization [HReading@landadvisors.com](mailto:HReading@landadvisors.com)



## CHINO VALLEY

A R I Z O N A

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.

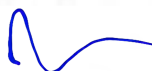
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

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](mailto:jmiller@chinoaz.net).

Thank you,



Jack W. Miller  
Mayor

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



STATE OF ARIZONA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KATIE HOBBS  
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.

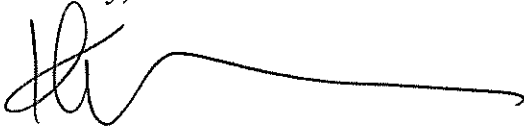
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KH' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Katie Hobbs  
Governor  
State of Arizona

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

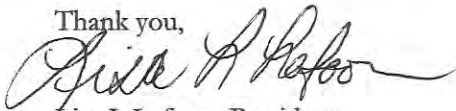
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

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](mailto:yavapai.trails@gmail.com).

Thank you,



Lisa L Lafoon, President  
Yavapai Trails Association  
[www.yavapai-trails.org](http://www.yavapai-trails.org)

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





## 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](mailto: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.

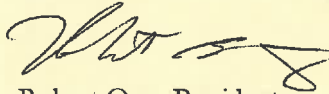
Upon completion, the Upper Verde River -Yavapai Ranch Land and Water Conservation Fund project will:

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](mailto:bogo@ypit.com).

Thank you,



Robert Ogo, President  
Tribal Board of Directors

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