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Archaeology Southwest Applauds Rep. Grijalva's Introduction of Legislation to Designate Arizona's Great Bend of the Gila as a National Monument

Tucson, Ariz. (August 2, 2024)—Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ) today reintroduced legislation in the House of Representatives seeking national monument designation for a remarkable cultural landscape known as the Great Bend of the Gila. Cosponsors include Jared Huffman (D-CA), André Carson D-(IN), Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), Dina Titus (D-NV), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), and Joe Neguse (D-CO).

This 80-mile stretch of the lower Gila River and surrounding desert spans southern Arizona's Maricopa and Yuma counties. Archaeology Southwest, an Arizona-based nonprofit whose headquarters are located in Representative Grijalva's district, is a founding member of the Respect Great Bend Coalition, which seeks better and permanent protections for the public lands of the Great Bend. Archaeology Southwest joins Tribal leaders and conservation and community partners in thanking Representative Grijalva for his unceasing commitment to the Great Bend of the Gila, his attention to the Indigenous Nations whose ancestors created its cultural landscapes, and his vision in sponsoring this legislation.

In response to news of the bill's introduction, Skylar Begay, Director of Tribal Collaboration for Archaeology Southwest and campaign co-manager for Respect Great Bend, said, "Over the past three years, I have explored the Great Bend of the Gila, learned of the deep histories it holds, and spoken with many Tribal leaders and members about what this landscape means to them. These experiences have only strengthened my resolve to advocate for the protection of this incredible place."

Begay is especially pleased that the bill supports Tribal involvement in the management of the proposed monument. "The Great Bend of the Gila's value as an ancestral and cultural landscape means it is paramount that Tribes have the opportunity to co-manage a Great Bend of the Gila National Monument if it is to be protected in the right ways," he added. The movement toward Indigenous co-management and co-stewardship of Tribal homelands is quite literally gaining ground, with frameworks developing in conjunction with Bears Ears National Monument and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument, among others.

Like those places, the Great Bend of the Gila is a globally significant landscape — invaluable, unique, and fragile. It preserves real human stories and Indigenous

knowledge spanning millennia. The 13 federally recognized Tribal Nations with cultural, historical, spiritual, and ancestral ties to the region are the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Cocopah Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Fort Yuma-Quechan Indian Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Tohono O’odham Nation, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe.

“This legislation is the culmination of over a decade of hard work and commitment on the part of many advocates to protect the values that make the Great Bend so significant, including its cultural, historical, and spiritual importance to 13 Tribes and other descendant and local communities,” said Aaron Wright, Preservation Anthropologist with Archaeology Southwest, who has undertaken extensive noninvasive documentation of heritage properties in the region, including hundreds of ground figure “geoglyphs” and thousands of rock imagery panels, in collaboration with Tribal team members.

“As Tribal partners make clear, the heritage places of the Great Bend and the stories they hold still urgently need better, more permanent protection,” Wright continued. “The time is now, and national monument designation is the right choice.”

About Archaeology Southwest

Founded in 1989, Archaeology Southwest is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, on the homelands of the Tohono O’odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. We are privileged to work across the US Southwest and into northwestern Mexico on the Lands and Territories of many Indigenous Tribes and descendant communities.

We practice Preservation Archaeology, a holistic and conservation-based approach to exploring and protecting heritage places while also honoring the diverse values these places hold for people. We gather information, help make it accessible and understandable, share it with the public and decision-makers, advocate for landscape-scale protection, and co-steward heritage preserves with people who share interests in their conservation. We are committed to real and ongoing collaboration with Tribes in all areas of our work.

Learn more at archaeologysouthwest.org.

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