

STATEMENT OF JAMIE CROCKETT, CO-OWNER OF GILA BACKCOUNTRY SERVICES, AND PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNER ADJACENT TO THE GILA RIVER, GILA HOT SPRINGS, NEW MEXICO, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING, REGARDING S. 3670, THE M.H. DUTCH SALMON GREATER GILA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ACT.

September 16, 2020

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for this opportunity to testify before you today in regard to the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act. As introduced by Senator Tom Udall and co-sponsored by Senator Martin Heinrich, this legislation seeks to permanently protect close to 450 river miles of the most outstanding rivers in the great state of New Mexico as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

My name is Jamie Crockett, my husband and I own Gila Backcountry Services, an outfitting business that offers multi-day trips into the Gila Wilderness and surrounding Gila National Forest. We provide mule packing for hunters, fishermen, biologists and trail crews; horse-back riding; birding and naturalist guides; as well as week-long rafting expeditions in the Gila Wilderness through the incredibly beautiful main canyon of the Gila River. We have been privileged to spend more than 5 days a week for the past 15 years in these astonishingly unique canyons, crossing the streams and diving into the deep pools – these places are important to us because they are our home and our livelihood.

We operate our outfitting business with a special use permit from the United States Forest Service, and we have a client base that includes many local area residents, as well as visitors from across the US and the globe. Put simply, the Gila River, the Gila Wilderness, and its numerous streams and creeks are a treasure that we have been fortunate to have the opportunity to share with others, and we would like to continue to be able to do so perpetually.

My family owns property near the Gila River in a rural community surrounded by the Gila Wilderness. I've travelled to my fair share of our nation's beautiful public lands and the remarkable West Fork and Middle Fork of the Gila River have some of the most outstanding scenery, geology and cultural resources that I have ever seen.

New Mexicans travel distances to get to the water's edge, it's where we connect with family and friends, it's where we escape the summer heat in the cool clear water, it's where we raise our children to respect nature, God, and each other. Preserving our ability to hunt Elk, to fish for Gila Trout, to camp, backpack, horseback ride, kayak, or to simply have a picnic on the banks of these wild and scenic rivers is something that is vital to the residents of Grant County, and New Mexicans alike. I believe that this legislation will preserve our rivers while protecting the traditional uses and values of the Gila River, San Francisco River and their main tributaries.

The New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division recently published data that reports that New Mexico's outdoor recreation economy is responsible for \$1.2 billion in income and 33,500 jobs in the state annually, and is among the state's fastest growing sectors. Tourism is New Mexico's second largest industry, and according to the New Mexico Tourism Department, over half of all

overnight visitors to the state engage in outdoor activities. Nearby towns like Silver City, the first Gateway Community to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, rely on protected lands and rivers to draw visitors and support businesses. Additional protections for public lands and rivers in the region, and the media and traveler attention they attract, will sustain their efforts to promote the region as a destination.

In the American West, we measure our wealth in water, so while Southwest New Mexico isn't dominated by wealth in a traditional sense, we are the heirs of an incredible fortune by way of this free-flowing gem – the Gila River watershed is our inheritance and our legacy. We carry the honor and the burden of protecting the river and its traditional uses indefinitely through this important legislation. So while the economic importance of drawing tourists and visitors from across the United States is a significant benefit of this bill, protecting our public lands and the intrinsic value of our way of life underscores why Grant County and surrounding communities are a destination for retirees and those seeking a better quality of life.

This bill is the result of a grassroots movement and nearly a decade of work from and by the people of my community to guarantee protections of these rivers, their values and current uses, and our traditional ways of life. The vast majority of residents in the Gila region support Wild and Scenic Rivers, and I know this from personal experience doing community outreach, attending meetings with fellow constituents and talking with my neighbors.

I have personally spoken with more than 150 small business owners throughout Grant County, about this legislation, and all of them have signed letters of support, because they feel just as I do, that we must protect these rivers for our children, and future generations to come. I have also worked closely with my neighbors and fellow property owners to express support for the protection of these rivers.

Furthermore, support for this legislation also includes resolutions passed by the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, which represents all 20 pueblos in New Mexico. In addition, the Towns of Hurley, Bayard, and Silver City have passed resolutions of support for this legislation, as has the Grant County Commission. Additionally, numerous sportsmen and women's organizations, veterans' groups, faith leaders, and civic groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens are in support of this legislation.

The M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act has been a community driven effort, involving years of outreach and education amongst diverse interests, and we are thankful that Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich worked with us to introduce this legislation in the United States Senate. Both Senators and their staff held numerous public meetings in a collaborative way with stakeholders of all stripes. In my familiarity with the drafting of this bill, I have witnessed firsthand how Senators Udall and Heinrich took great care in meeting with community members that represent a variety of opinions on this subject and have done the work to ensure that the needs and concerns of everyone involved have been acknowledged and accounted for in the text of the bill.

On behalf of the many local area farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers, private landowners, recreationists, business owners, tribes, and elected officials, I wish to convey our collective view that it is vitally important to protect these critical watersheds and rivers by designating certain

segments of the Gila River system for inclusion as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

I encourage the full committee to proceed with expedited consideration and approval of the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for your time and consideration. This concludes my testimony, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.