



Audubon Arizona's statement delivered at the June 15 Camp Verde meeting of the Arizona House Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources

Representative Bowers, Senator Griffin, and members of the Committee,

We are grateful that legislators and other water leaders are confronting our state's significant water issues. Thank you for convening this opportunity. My name is Haley Paul and I am the Policy Manager for Audubon Arizona—the state office for National Audubon Society.

As we sit together today, we are located very close to three Important Bird Areas, or IBAs as we affectionately call them. The purpose of the Important Bird Area Program is to identify a network of sites that maintain the long-term viability of wild bird populations while engaging the public to conserve those areas of critical habitat.

The IBAs near us today include: The Upper Verde River Wildlife Area, the Tuzigoot IBA, and the Lower Oak Creek IBA. IBAs are of such value to the communities near them that the Town of Camp Verde requested that Audubon Arizona and our partners assess whether the area surrounding the Verde River at Camp Verde could meet the criteria to earn the prestigious designation.

You might be noticing a theme with our Important Bird Areas: they tend to be centered around water. Because, well, birds need water—we all do.

Audubon Arizona's objective is to make sure that the solutions to our water challenges serve both people and wildlife. Water management policies that provide more certainty and reliability for all users are of critical importance.

Not that we need another reminder of the dry winter we had, but large swaths of our forests are currently closed to public access due to the overwhelming risk of wildfire. The time to act is now. In 2020, we face a 52% chance of a Lower Colorado River shortage declaration due to declining water levels in Lake Mead, and that likelihood increases as drought continues. We must complete the Drought Contingency Plan so that we have the predictability we need to plan for a drier future. We're excited to see the renewed commitment from water users, elected officials, and other stakeholders to get the DCP done this year.

Audubon Arizona also leads a coalition of birders, hunters, anglers, outdoor enthusiasts, and businesses known as the Western Rivers Action Network. It is estimated that \$2.4 billion of economic output is generated annually thanks to the activity of folks who enjoy outdoor recreation in Arizona. We need to ensure our state prevents long-term negative impacts on Arizona's economy by finding collaborative solutions that protect our rivers and groundwater.

Thank you for including us in this critical conversation.