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Arizona's Riparian Wildlife Areas - Green Ribbons through the Desert (<http://www.gorp.com/parks-guide/gila-box-riparian-national-conservation-area-outdoor-pp2-guide-cid401719.html>)



Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area

The **Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area** is one of the southwest's best kept secrets. It takes in 21,767 acres of public land along with another 1,720 acre chunk of private land. Two legendary streams, the **Gila River** and **Bonita Creek**, pass through it. Sections of **Eagle Creek** and the **San Francisco River** keep them company. The area is a near wilderness, a wonderful place to explore with exquisite desert environments, fascinating historic sites, and interesting wildlife. Plus, the Gila's a legendary float.

In February, 1998 the BLM released its final management plan for the Gila River NCA. Expect changes in the next few years, but for now there are very few developed recreational facilities besides two boat access points and one hiking trail, the **Old Safford Morenci Trail**.

Floating the Gila

Generally the Gila River can be floated year long, depending on the flow and type of raft used. This 23 mile float takes you through a spectacular unroaded canyon with 500 foot sheer cliff walls and dramatic geologic features. Bird watching is popular with over 150 species of birds making their home in the canyon at some time of the year. Raptors such as the uncommon zoned tailed hawk, black hawk, and peregrine falcon can be seen, along with many of the colorful neotropical birds that migrate to this area in the spring and summer. Most of all, this river is known for its solitude and primitive nature.

Put in: South of the town of Clifton on State route 191 turn onto the Black Hills Back Country Byway and travel south four miles until you reach the Gila River and the Old Safford Bridge. The best place to put in is on the south side of the river.

Take out: From Safford cross the Gila River north on Eighth Avenue and turn right at the "Y" onto Airport Road. Travel six miles to a stop sign and turn left onto Sanchez Road. From there travel six more miles until you reach a Bonita Creek BLM sign and turn left onto that dirt road. Once on the dirt road continue traveling approximately 2.5 miles to the West Entry Sign of the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area. From the Entry sign travel .5 miles to Dry Canyon parking area on the right side of the road. Dry Canyon parking area can be used for overnight parking while on the river.

Flow Guidelines

Since the water flow in the Gila River varies dramatically from year to year it is difficult to state average flows by month. One should always obtain the water flow in cubic feet per second (cfs) prior to planning to float the Gila River.

The months January through April experience the highest flows from snowmelt and rain. These flows can range between 100,000 cfs to only 250 cfs with extremely cold water temperatures. Flows generally are much lower during the months of May and June and rise some during the rainy season of July, August and September. The following flow level guidelines are offered as a safety measure in determining what water craft the river should be floated with.

CFS Level: 10,000 and above

Not Recommended

CFS Level: 6,000 to 10 000

Type of Water Craft: 14 ft. river raft and larger.

Difficulties: Very swift cold water with class III rapids. Logs and debris probable in water. Advanced and very experienced rafters only.

CFS Level: 3,500 to 6,000

Type of Water Craft: 12 ft. river raft and larger. Advanced and very experienced hard shell kayakers.

Difficulties: Swift current with class II and III rapids. Experienced rafters only. At upper level debris and some logs could be in the water.

CFS Level: 1,500 to 3,500

Type of Water Craft: 12 ft. river raft and larger. Advanced kayakers (inflatable and hard shell).

Difficulties: Probably the best time to float the river for novice rafters. Challenging float for kayakers.

CFS Level: 500 to 1,500

Type of Water Craft: 14 ft. river raft and smaller. Inflatable and hard shell kayaks. Experienced canoeists.

Difficulties: Larger river rafts will have to maneuver frequently to find deep water to float, but good for beginners. Excellent for novice inflatable kayakers and canoeists.

CFS Level: 150 to 500

Type of Water Craft: Canoes, and inflatable kayaks.

Difficulties: Excellent for beginners. River narrows considerably with nice chutes with some white water. Floaters may have to pull their boats through short shallow stretches. Warm weather and drifting solitude.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

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Read more: <http://www.gorp.com/parks-guide/gila-box-riparian-national-conservation-area-outdoor-pp2-guide-cid401719.html#ixzz2Orxr2g8c>