

INITIATIVE TO FURTHER PROTECT THE LOWER LITTLE COLORADO RIVER

DESCRIPTION

In the fall of 2020, the Grand Canyon Trust and American Rivers began an initiative to comprehensively assess the threats to the confluence of the Little Colorado and Colorado rivers, the Little Colorado River (LCR) Gorge, and the LCR watershed. A key part of the initiative is holding conversations with community members to better understand the watershed from the perspectives of people who live, work, and are deeply tied to the region. The initiative's overall goal is to support community-based approaches that maintain tribal sovereignty, permanently protect traditional uses, and prevent unwanted commercial and industrial developments in the region (e.g., the proposed Grand Canyon Escalade, the current proposals to dam the LCR Gorge and its tributaries for producing electricity, and other unknown threats that may occur in the future). Guided by this overall goal, our initial objectives are to: 1) understand the threats to the LCR Sub-Basin; 2) lay the foundation for strategies that will address threats to the LCR Sub-Basin in a culturally-grounded and community-oriented manner, with particular focus on Indigenous concerns and hopes for the region; and 3) determine whether there is community interest in the Grand Canyon Trust and American Rivers serving as technical partners in efforts to provide greater protection to the LCR Sub-Basin (see Sub-Basin Map, p. 2).

BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Grand Canyon Trust works to safeguard the Grand Canyon and the Colorado Plateau, while supporting the rights of its Native peoples. Between 2012 and 2017, the Trust supported the Save the Confluence families' campaign to defeat the proposed tourist tram down to the confluence of the Little Colorado and Colorado rivers (which Save the Confluence defeated in 2017). The Trust is currently working with homeowners, grazing permittees, the grazing committee of the Navajo Nation Western Agency, Division of Natural Resources, the Hopi Nation, and others to defeat three proposals to dam the LCR and its tributaries. The Trust is also seeking to secure long-term protection of the confluence and the LCR Gorge in partnership with local community members and a growing alliance of community partners.

American Rivers is a national river conservation organization whose mission is to protect wild rivers, restore damaged rivers, and to conserve clean water for people and nature. American Rivers' Southwest River Protection Program works with partners like Grand Canyon Trust and tribal nations to permanently conserve important free-flowing rivers in the Southwest U.S. using a variety of tools and strategies.

APPROACH

In this first phase of the initiative, we are working to better understand the threats to the LCR Sub-Basin through a combination of policy and law analyses and community conversations. We are assessing a menu of potential strategies that might be useful in protecting the region such as tribal laws, cooperative management agreements, and federal laws. The initiative's community conversations and policy/law analyses will be primarily conducted by Rachel Ellis. Ms. Ellis has worked with Black Mesa Trust and the Grand Canyon Trust for the last two years on issues related to the LCR. Her graduate work at Northern Arizona University focused on protective strategies for the Confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado Rivers. For an example of her work, see ["A Confluence of Anticolonial Pathways for Indigenous Sacred Site Protection"](#) published in April 2020.

Once we have completed the first phase (by end of 2020), we will provide a report on our progress and findings back to the people who participated in the community conversations. We will also gauge community interest in advancing a strategy or set of strategies to better protect the LCR Sub-Basin and determine whether there is a role for American Rivers and the Grand Canyon Trust as technical partners in that work. If there is momentum and interest behind taking next steps, we hope to form an Advisory Group of community members in early 2021 to guide Phase 2 of this initiative.

TIMELINE

July 2020

September-November

December

Early 2021

Begin policy and law analyses

Engage in Community-member conversations

Continue policy and law analyses

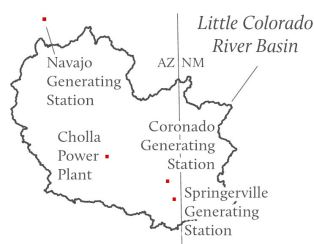
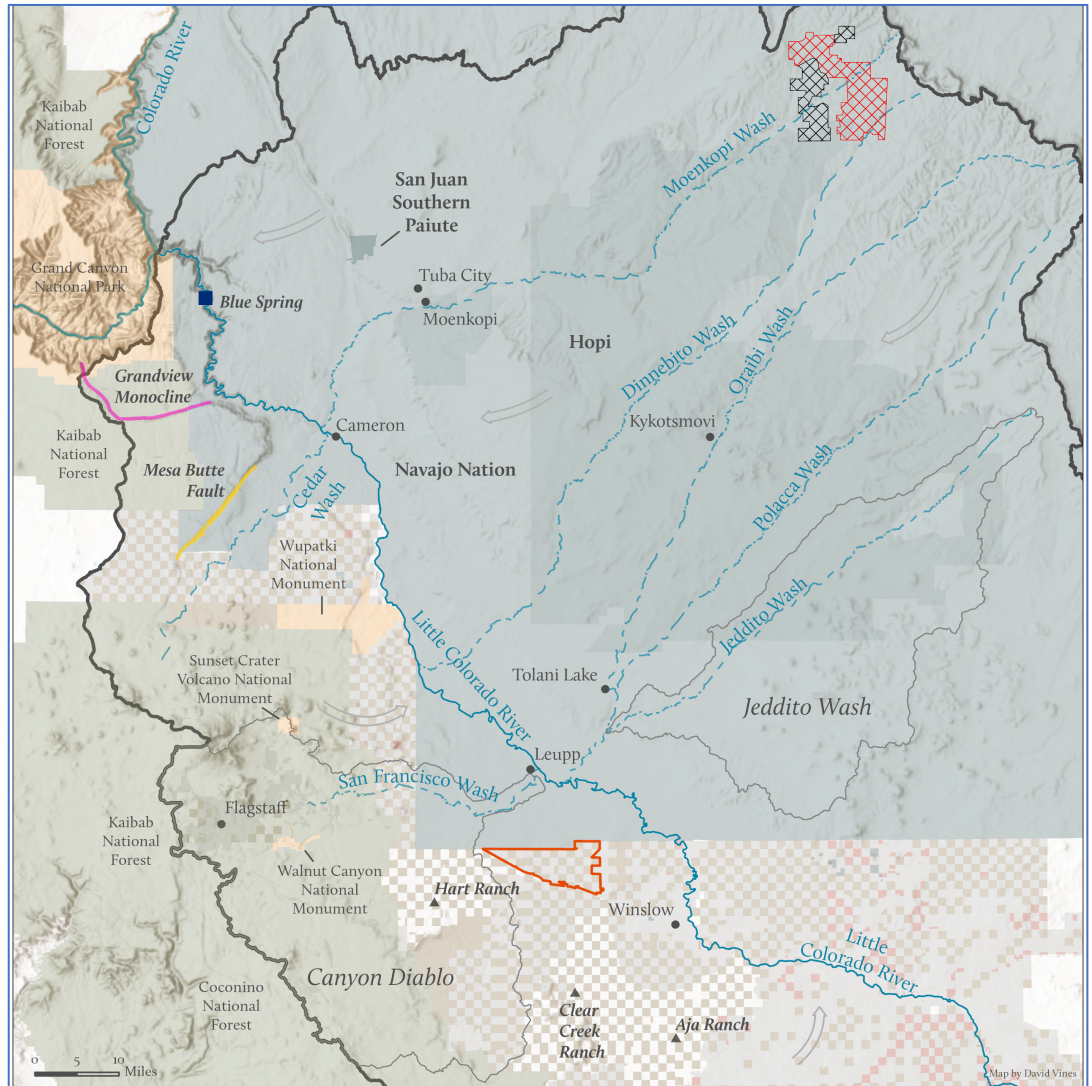
Complete policy and law analyses

Complete a Summary Report to share back to Community members

Collaborate with Community members to form an Advisory Coalition to create the next steps of the initiative

Begin Phase 2 of the initiative in which an Advisory Coalition identifies the most viable protective pathways to pursue

LOWER LITTLE COLORADO RIVER SUB-BASIN MAP



Lower Little Colorado River Basin

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|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| River Basin Boundary | Hopi | Bureau of Land Management |
| Sub-basins | Navajo Nation | Private |
| Rivers and Washes | San Juan Southern Paiute | State |
| Hopi Ranch Lands | Mesa Butte Fault | National Park Service |
| Kayenta Mine Permit Area | Red Gap Ranch | National Forest |
| Black Mesa Mine | Generalized Groundwater Flow | Grandview Monocline |

Source: USGS, BLM, USFS, Hopi Bureau of Natural Resources.

**Note: This is a draft document. Please do not share widely.*