

## First and Wildest: The Gila Wilderness at 100

**Elizabeth Hightower Allen, Editor**

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In 1921, then-forest ranger Aldo Leopold proposed that the remote lands around New Mexico's Gila River be protected against roads, structures, and resource extraction. They were thus designated as the US's first wilderness area. *First and Wildest* celebrates the centennial of Leopold's bold initiative with lyrical, impassioned essays, photographs, and poems from those in deep love with this singular landscape.

Evocative voices pay tribute to the Gila's natural beauty, dig into its ecological importance to an impressive number of animal and plant species, and wax poetic about its restorative and emotive powers. The eloquent contributors include writers, scientists, politicians, activists, and conservation professionals who share their diverse perspectives about why the Gila is so important to them—and to larger communities.

Amid brilliant and gorgeous nature writing, the collection aims to broaden traditional views of wilderness management—"to reimagine a land ethic that is inclusive, whole, and wild." Apache Joe Saenz calls for greater Indigenous involvement in Gila management decisions, while Priscilla Solis Ybarra expands on the historical concept of land ownership to champion more communal decision making.

Several contributors elaborate on how prevailing forestry practices have exacerbated the spate of wildfires seen all over the West during decades-long megadrought conditions. Other contributors document the successful fight to keep the Gila River from being "dammed to wear a concrete straitjacket," while others focus on how important wilderness immersion is to emotional and spiritual health. Noteworthy among the entries is Gabe Vasquez's insightful call for more access and outdoor mentorship for underserved communities, to be "better caretakers of the land and of each other."

This anthology is a great addition to the literature of the American Southwest, natural history, and environmental conservation. It melds lush nature writing with thought-provoking calls for alternative environmental policies for the Gila and other national wilderness treasures.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January / February 2022)

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