

My name is Don Stailey. I am almost 80 years old and have lived almost every minute of those years right here on the Gila River. I was born a stone's throw from the River and have never wandered far from it. I have swum, fished, hiked, hunted, ridden, farmed and walked almost every mile from Red Rock to the headwaters of the Gila. So I think I'm qualified to speak about the moods and needs of this River.

I have watched the River flood and erode away many acres of prime farmland. I have seen it completely dry up in short areas during drought conditions which happen more and more often recently. I have watched tributaries that used to run almost year round now run only when it rains hard. I watched from beginning to end as the Whitewater-Baldy Fire burned almost 300,000 acres of forest.

My grandparents brought their family to this Valley about 1921. They bought land on which to farm and raise vegetables to sell. I remember the day over 35 years later when they paid off the mortgage on that farm. My wife and I have had the privilege of raising our children on this same farm and I have seen *them* come to love the River every bit as much as I do.

*Remember* is probably the most important word in the English language.

"Remember the Alamo!" The federal government didn't help one bit.

"Remember Pearl Harbor!" The bureaucrats were told the Japanese were coming, but they chose not to believe it was true.

"Remember 9-1-1!" Again bureaucrats were warned about what Al Qaeda could do. Again they didn't believe it could happen.

"Remember the Whitewater-Baldy Fire!" Local people predicted a catastrophic fire sooner or later because of mismanagement of the forest by the bureaucrats. And where was the accountability of the biggest disaster in the history of the Gila National Forest?

Now those same bureaucrats want to take control of our beloved Gila River. The River *is* wild and scenic, but what made it that way? The farmers, ranchers and good people who live here have made the River what it is today, not some politician in Washington, DC, who probably thinks *New Mexico* is not a state yet.

My wife and I recently watched the movie, *Forrest Gump*, about a good man who has a rather low IQ. Baxter Black observed that Gump's "simplistic reasoning usually made sense. His response to anyone who called him stupid was to say, 'Stupid is as stupid does.'"

Black's interpretation of that phrase is, "'You don't have to be stupid to be stupid.' One can have a high IQ and still be stupid." This leads Black to observe that ... "we in America have the 'luxury to be stupid.' And we seem to take advantage of that freedom on a regular basis."

Water is the lifeblood of this area. In 1955, you would be hard pressed to find acreage that wasn't farmed in this Valley. When the water rights were re-adjudicated between 1960 and 1965, we lost about 18,000 acre/feet of water rights which had been allocated to farms in this Valley. What we see now in farmed land is roughly 50% of what we used to see. How can more regulations, more bureaucracy improve this? Another phrase to remember: If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Designating the Gila River as wild and scenic and putting bureaucrats in charge is one of the stupidest ideas I've ever heard. "You don't have to be stupid to be stupid." You can be really intelligent and still be stupid.