

**Concerned Citizens & Retired Miners Coalition
PO Box 512, Superior, AZ 85173**

**Statement of Roy Chavez,
Spokesperson for the Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition**

**To the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands**

Opposition to H.R. 1904

June 14, 2011

The **Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition** is a group of citizens whose members include local residents, former miners and friends of the Town of Superior.

The Coalition is not opposed to mining. In fact, we strongly support responsible mining practices in and around our community of Superior, Arizona.

However, we oppose the federal land exchange bill H.R. 1904 because it proposes to hand over Oak Flat Campground to Resolution Copper Company without the necessary potential health, water and environmental impacts analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

This is public land, and the public must be heard openly and fairly under the NEPA process.

As this Subcommittee hearing proceeds today, concerned citizens opposing the land exchange are holding a vigil at the Campground to Save Oak Flat! We believe the land exchange is not needed for Resolution Copper Company to move forward with their plans to mine in this area.

Loss of Oak Flat Campground & Threats to Devil's Canyon

Oak Flat and Devil's Canyon is recognized as one of the most unique, scenic, popular and unspoiled areas in the State of Arizona. It is easily accessible to millions of visitors from the Phoenix and Tucson metropolitan areas within a short drive.

Privatization of this land would end public access to some of the most spectacular outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing areas in Arizona. It would deprive the Town of Superior, currently land-locked at only four (4) square miles, from economic diversification in and around our community.

A decision regarding these public lands should be made with the utmost knowledge and care. Once these lands are lost to the public, they can never be regained.

We are particularly concerned that a legislated land exchange would bypass necessary and meaningful environmental impact studies that should be enforced **before** the land is exchanged and describe, at a minimum:

- Why Oak Flat Campground is needed for the mine project;
- Does block cave mining eventually lead to open pit;
- Where the massive amount of waste by-product will be dumped;
- How much water the mine project will use;
- How water pollution from mining activities will be prevented;
- How our water supply will react to this mining method; and
- To what extent the riparian habitat at Oak Flat and Devil's Canyon would be displaced and/or destroyed.

Water & Destruction to the Surface

Queen Creek directly feeds into the main water supply for the Town of Superior (approximately 2,000 acre feet annually). Block cave mining extracts large masses of underground, stable earth which causes an uncontrolled shift of the water course and alters that water course to pull away from Queen Creek, depleting and disrupting the natural flow.

Mining is one of the most water-intensive industries on earth. In 1946, the Queen Creek was called a perennial flowing stream. When the Magma Mine—a cut and fill mining project—was in full production during the 60s to 70s, we in Superior remember how the riparian areas at Oak Flat, Queen Creek and in the Town of Superior dried up.

Superior and Oak Flat are in the Maricopa County Active Management Area, so whatever water is used for mining will affect the East Valley in addition to the local community. An in-depth analysis regarding the impact of a potential mine of this magnitude at Oak Flat to the water balance of the **entire region** should be conducted before this bill is even considered by Congress.

We are alarmed about the issue of subsidence by virtue of the mine's proposed block cave method and its effect on the Oak Flat campground, the Apache Leap escarpment, US Highway 60 through Queen Creek and the Town of Superior.

The mine has finally admitted to “minimal” subsidence at Oak Flat—just how “minimal?”

They have admittedly chosen the block cave method to cut and fill because it is the least expensive and quickest method to approach this massive ore body. Experts have demonstrated that there will be irreparable destruction to the surface. Since the block cave method creates a huge volume of tailings which are toxic to both the water supply and the air we breathe, we are concerned regarding reclamation of these tailings upon mine closure.

The overburden of this mine is defined as tuff or volcanic compressed dust, which is very unstable. Even after closure, the potential for destructive ground movement is extremely high and can continue for decades.

The mine indicates they will monitor this movement, which is completely uncontrollable. How much more destruction will take place after the mine is gone?

We don't believe that this method of mining will create as many jobs as projected. It is general knowledge that the cut and fill method creates far more jobs; and as shown at the peak of production in the 60s and 70s at the Magma Mine, there were 1,400 employees, as compared to 400 during the reopening in the 80s and 90s.

Additionally, the process of mining in the 21st century is very technologically advanced and requires specialized training. Resolution Copper Company has not indicated that they will hire untrained, local labor. In fact, today's activity on the project reflects an influx of mining technicians from outside the community. We routinely see vehicles with license plates from Utah, Colorado and Mexico. We are seeing more and more articles regarding the development of robotic workers for future mining activities. These robotic systems are being tested today in South American and Australian mining operations. It would be no surprise if many of the technical jobs that are available will be held by highly trained individuals sitting at a computer in another state—or even another country—controlling our robotic work-force remotely.

While Resolution Copper Company has granted a few local high school scholarships, contributes to a high school robotics program and brings in college interns during the summer, it is but a token effort toward the volume and type of future jobs that will need to be filled.

Threat to the Town of Superior's Economic Diversification

Many members of our Coalition have lived through the boom and bust cycle of mining. Mining markets are volatile and unpredictable as seen recently at Pinto Valley, Safford and San Manuel, Arizona.

The loss of this natural resource and already protected public lands compromises the potential for our community to foster and promote a more diversified economy based upon tourism and outdoor activity. At a minimum, the Boyce Thompson State Park to the west and the Oak Flat Campground

to the east create a natural flow of traffic to and through the Town. Tourists, Boy Scout troops and other individuals and groups routinely pass through to camp overnight at the Oak Flat Campground. They stop for gas, sundries and refreshments at local establishments in far greater numbers than local workers. Superior is a natural “pit stop” for eco-tourism and this is the type of activity that sustains our economy.

WE CAN NO LONGER BASE OUR FUTURE ON ONE SINGLE INDUSTRY OR EMPLOYER.

As an example, during the past ten (10) years of the Resolution Copper Company Mine Project, Superior has seen little or no affect to its revenue base or population. There is a Resolution Copper Mine Office located on Main Street; however, it is merely an office building with conference facilities. One or two other specialized offices were rented for office space under short-term leases; however, these storefronts provided no local employees and no local foot traffic. There is a Temporary Employment Office that provides mine workers on a short-term basis—with these jobs providing no benefits to workers and little or no assistance to them through the Arizona Unemployment program once they are laid off.

In fact, the 2010 Arizona census reflected a decrease in Superior’s population from 3,200 to 2,800—a drop of over 400 people. If this decade of the Resolution Mine Project is an example of what we should expect for the future of the Town, the economic picture is grim. This is a UK company mining copper to fuel growth in China, hiring outside workers with no commitment to shop or live in the Town of Superior. Very little or none of the profits or ‘economic stimulus’ the mine touts from this project will benefit the Town of Superior.

It is clear that Superior should focus its sustainable economic growth on the tourist industry fueled by Arizona’s natural and beautiful surroundings as well as its moderate climate.

H.R. 1904 again addresses the inclusion of lands within the Town of Superior known as the Fairview Cemetery and the Superior Airport. A decade ago, the Town Council and its Administration began working with the Forest Service to acquire the Fairview Cemetery property. The Town had money set aside for the specific purpose of purchasing the land. Administration had prepared all the preliminary maps and studies required by the Forest Service—we were merely waiting for the unit price value of the land to be determined. That process was abruptly brought to a halt when Representative Renzi authored and introduced the first land exchange legislation—which included the Fairview Cemetery property. Had we continued with the course originally charted, the Town of Superior would already own our cemetery grounds.

The Airport property is already owned by the Town of Superior—under stipulation that an airstrip be maintained and managed on the property. Inclusion of this section in the land exchange legislation

is redundant and will cause the Town to pay twice to own it—once when it originally passed from the County to the Town in the 90s and again if the land exchange is approved by Congress!

Summary/Catering to Special Interests

H.R. 1904 does not represent a land exchange that is in the broader public interest. Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon believed that they were protecting Oak Flat from big businesses interests in acquiring public lands for development, mining and transportation. More and more local citizens are questioning this mine project and feel that this area should remain in the public sector rather than being lost to mining.

No other mining corporation in this area has been allowed to bypass the Federal NEPA process. This legislation is nothing more than forgiveness before permission.

This land exchange sets a terrible precedent and is simply bad policy. NEPA offers the federal land managers and the public a chance to “look before you leap” so that questions can be addressed and changes can be negotiated to offer the best possible solution for the American public. We feel it is critical that we first analyze the scope of this monumental project as well as its’ long-term effects.

We believe that Resolution Copper Company should not be exempt from the required national permitting studies and analyses that have been required of the other mines in the area by virtue of a land exchange.

For these and other reasons, we oppose H.R. 1904 and feel that it should be rejected.

Sincerely,

Roy C. Chavez, Spokesperson
Concerned Citizens & Retired Miners Coalition
520-827-9133
roycchavez53@yahoo.com