

**TESTIMONY OF THE INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF ARIZONA
BY
GOVERNOR NORMAN COOEYATE, ZUNI TRIBE
REGARDING SENATE BILL S.409**

**Presented to
Chairman Ron Wyden and Members of the Subcommittee
on Public Lands and Forests
Hon. Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC. 20510**

June 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members and Guests. Keshi, k'o don la:k'yadinapkyā. Good afternoon. My name is Norman Coeeyate, Governor of the Zuni (A:shiwī) Tribe. My Tribe is a member of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona.

I speak today on behalf of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) which consists of 20 federally recognized Tribes, Nations and Communities in Arizona who join together on matters of international, national, and statewide importance to the Tribes with lands which are now within the State of Arizona and other states.

[Governor Coeeyate may acknowledge certain Tribal leaders in attendance at this point in his presentation.]

My Tribe, the Zuni Tribe, actively works to protect sacred places. We were successful in the recent designation of Mt. Taylor, Dewankwi Kyahachu Yalanne, as a Cultural Property in New Mexico. We fought for the protection of the sacred Zuni Salt Lake from depletion by groundwater pumping, and we were successful in the recovery for our people of Kolhu:wala:wa, the Zuni Heaven Reservation in northeastern Arizona. Now, we are grateful for this opportunity to address the Subcommittee concerning the religious, cultural and environmental concerns of our 20 Tribes related to the lands which would be impacted by S.409. ITCA opposes the passage of S.409 for many reasons including the fact that the proposed mine would destroy much of the earth in an area of Oak Flat, Apache Leap, Gaan Canyon and the Pond, that is of spiritual, religious, cultural and historical importance to Native Americans. A copy of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona Resolution 0209 dated June 12, 2009 is attached to this presentation.

Our Tribal members of the ITCA Tribes are the children of the ancients who first walked on the lands which are the subject of S.409. Archeological evidence reveals our ancestors occupied, lived, worshiped, died and have been buried in this sacred land for thousands of years. Of course, these facts we know without the validation of academics. Our songs, stories, religious

practices, and our ancient gatherings together in this place of peace and refuge are part of us. The shrines, sacred paintings, places of prayer and religious practices are near its springs, caves, canyons, and cliffs. The sacred plants, medicines and paints and animal places nurtured by this place are there. These are the essential and irreplaceable elements of the religious and cultural practices of our people.

We understand that everything in the natural world is alive and has power. We have a name for everything: the plants, the animals, the birds, the atmosphere, the minerals, the winds, the stars, the bodies of waters, the places, and everything else. We recognize the power that each element of the natural world has, and that each individual power is directly related to particular Holy Beings.

We recognize that each of these elements works in concert with the other elements that make up an ecosystem. The power of each species is influenced by the other species in the ecosystem, and these combinations of power contribute to the power of the entire ecosystem. All of these powers are in turn influenced by the particular power of the place where they are found, so that the power of each ecosystem cannot be duplicated or replaced.

We need access to this place and to particular species and ecosystems, in person or remotely, by physical access, prayer, song, vision, or ceremony. Our traditional specialists use song cycles and ceremonies to and from this place - just like modern scientists use formulas and technology - for the healing, protection, and physical and spiritual well-being and happiness of our Tribes.

Oak Flat is part of a sky island rising to heights from the arid land surrounding it. It is a weather maker. A place of snow and rain, refuge and religious worship.

The great mountains of the Southwest rising from this arid land have provided us with points of reference and anchors for both our collective and unique identities since the beginning of time. We have survived in this arid land since the beginning because of our relationships with them.

These mountains are living beings. They were created during the time when the earth was formed, and since then they have provided and sustained life to all living beings. This great geologic feature, which supports Oak Flat, Apache Leap and Gaan Canyon, and her sister mountains provide life to all living beings.

Our ancestors, represented by the Tribes who ask for your understanding and help today and our sacred mountains, are all born from the womb of Mother Earth.

This area, Oak Flat, the canyon known in the Apache language as Gaan Canyon, and Apache Leap - exist for the very special purpose which sustains our unique relationship with the natural world. Therefore, we have the responsibility to protect it and it in turn provides for the people.

The languages of our Tribes are ancient and unique. We are the keepers of these ancient words given to us for all things and places in the beginning. Therefore, we each have our own words for this area, its plants, animals and sacred paints and medicines.

The Apache leaders have spoken to you in the past and they are in this room today. By their words, Oak Flat is *Chich' il Bi [dagoteel]*. The proposed Resolution Mine will destroy this living place and its unique ecosystems. It will destroy the living things that are associated with Holy Beings, the Gaan of the Apache Religion - the Mountain Spirits to those who may not know these Apache words. It will forever alter, and damage the waters on the land, and below the ground, and from the springs. This water has been provided by the snow and rain as a blessing to this land over the eons of time.

We are careful and discrete in the practices of our religion. We are hesitant to provide this information because it may not be received with the proper respect. Such information has been used by those who would desecrate our sacred places, steal and destroy objects necessary to the practice of our religion, and to ravage the final resting places of our ancestors, our spiritual leaders, and the funerary objects placed there and "put away" to resume their place as part of the earth.

Some things, such as the Resolution Mine, may look attractive at first, but when you are fully informed you realize that they simply must not be done. This place, Oak Flat and Apache Leap, cannot be replaced and should not be disturbed. The remains of our ancestors and other things related cannot be in good conscience be moved or disturbed.

We respectfully ask that you protect this sacred place - Oak Flat, Apache Leap, Gaan Canyon, and all that is part of it.

Mr. Chairman, we respectfully request that the Resolution 0209 of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona dated June 12, 2009, the statement made by Shan Lewis, President of ITCA to this Subcommittee on July 9, 2008, concerning S.3157, the predecessor to S.409, and the letter dated April 6, 2009, to the Honorable Nick J. Rahall from Shan Lewis, President of ITCA, which are attached to my statement today, be made part of the record and carefully considered by the Senate.

Thank you on behalf of all 20 Tribes of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona.