

Media Release
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Diverse Coalition Criticizes Resolution Copper Mine Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Proposed mine would destroy Oak Flat and harm air, water, wildlife and cultural resources

Phoenix, AZ – Yesterday, November 7, 2019, a coalition of 18 concerned groups filed comments detailing serious deficiencies in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on Resolution Copper’s proposed mine. The coalition urged the Tonto National Forest to fulfill its role as a public steward instead of putting forward a DEIS focused on delivering maximum profits to foreign mining companies. The groups asked the Tonto National Forest to start over and properly complete studies, analyses, and plans about the mine that the Forest should have conducted before issuing its DEIS. The DEIS lacked critical information, as required under the relevant laws, especially given the mine will have permanent far-reaching consequences for the people living in the region and for the air, water, lands, and wildlife.

Roger Featherstone, Director of the Arizona Mining Reform Coalition, who led the group effort, said, “We are dismayed by how much is missing in the DEIS and how the impacts have been either underestimated or completely ignored. Without more technical information, the public cannot understand the full extent of the dangers to our communities and the environment. Even using the available information, our comments paint a compelling picture of how this project would devastate Superior, Oak Flat, and the surrounding land and water resources. The process has strengthened our resolve to stop this project and protect Oak Flat. If the Forest Service won’t stop the project, we must.”

Oak Flat is an hour east of Phoenix, Arizona, and is sacred to Indigenous people, including the Western Apache, and is an ecological and recreational haven. The struggle to protect Oak Flat from the proposed mine has been ongoing for 15 years and is complicated by a controversial provision added in the dead of night to the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 3003) that transfers Oak Flat to the foreign mining companies that own Resolution Copper upon completion of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The coalition of conservation, faith, Native American, and recreational organizations filed 6,436 pages of comments in response to the DEIS. The coalition explains that the proposed mine could use more water than is available in the San Tan Valley, where massive water pumping would occur; create a several hundred foot deep toxic lake in the middle of a huge crater created by underground mining that would completely inundate Oak Flat; create a toxic tailings

waste site that would bury 5,000 acres of land and forever threaten downstream communities; and destroy tribal sacred areas and curtail the religious freedom of Native American Tribes.

“On behalf of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, I thank the Arizona Mining Reform Coalition and other environmental organizations for standing with us in exposing the dangers of the proposed Resolution Copper Mine and the need for the Tonto National Forest (TNF) to issue a new, honest Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS),” said **Terry Rambler, Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe**. “The Coalition’s comments establish beyond doubt that the DEIS analyses are incomplete, inaccurate, or wholly lacking in many critical areas regarding the impacts of the proposed mine. Unfortunately, the DEIS fails to inform the residents of Superior, other local towns and Arizonans of the range of hazards and social and economic costs, which will likely occur if this mine goes forward as proposed in the DEIS. Tribes, Arizonans and all Americans deserve a fair, balanced and objective analysis of the proposed mine – that is TNF’s duty. On December 22, the Tribe will file its own comments to the DEIS, which will further elaborate on the points made by the Coalition, while focusing on the very real damage to Apache culture and traditional religious beliefs. It is my hope that TNF heeds our collective comments and discard this faulty DEIS.”

Although the public comment period for the DEIS has concluded, the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other Tribal Governments with ancestral ties to the Oak Flat area have an additional 45 days to complete their comments.

"The Draft Environmental Impact Statement confirms what we have said all along: the project is too big, too harmful, and too invasive for our Tonto National Forest," said **Don Steuter, conservation chair for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter**. "This mine is so destructive that even a 1300-page study cannot adequately analyze the environmental impacts, including critical issues like groundwater depletion in Pinal County and public health and safety from a potential tailings dam failure, let alone the cultural and religious impacts to the Western Apache people. The Forest Service needs to go back to the drawing board and fully consider an alternative that does not destroy Oak Flat."

Because of the destruction this project would cause to communities in the region, including Tribal communities, and the environment, communities of faith from around the country have opposed the Resolution Copper Mine and have contributed to the comment writing effort.

Oak Flat is not only a special place for hiking, birding, rock climbing, camping and other recreational activities. “Oak Flat is a sacred space, a sanctuary, for many in the San Carlos Apache Tribe,” said **Rev. Doug Bland, Director of Arizona Interfaith Power & Light**. "People of faith and conscience here in Arizona have much to learn from our Indigenous neighbors about how land, water, and air are sacred gifts from our Creator.” Rev. Bland has taken members of his faith-based organization to Oak Flat for prayer, ceremonies, and to stand in solidarity with San Carlos spiritual leaders.

The loss of precious desert riparian habitat, unacceptable loss of water for communities and the environment, and the fouling of the normal mine permitting process by two huge foreign mining companies, greatly concerns conservation organizations.

Resolution Copper is a limited liability company formed and owned by foreign mining corporations, Rio Tinto and BHP. The Tonto National Forest has written the DEIS in response to a proposal from Resolution Copper to build a huge underground block cave mine at Oak Flat. The proposed mine would destroy 16,000 acres of public and private land and would use more water than the City of Tempe, Arizona.

For a copy of the comments, go to:

<http://azminingreform.org/coalition-files-massive-comments-on-oak-flat-deis/>

The groups that signed the comment letter include:

Arizona Mining Reform Coalition ♦ Arizona Inter-Faith Power and Light ♦ Center for Biological Diversity ♦ Community Water Coalition of Southern Arizona ♦ Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition ♦ Concerned Climbers of Arizona ♦ Earthworks ♦ Maricopa Audubon Society ♦ Oklahoma Indigenous Theatre Company ♦ Natural Allies ♦ Patagonia Area Resource Alliance ♦ Save the Scenic Santa Ritas ♦ Save Tonto National Forest ♦ Sierra Club—Grand Canyon Chapter ♦ Sky Island Alliance ♦ Tucson Audubon Society ♦ Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation—Green Sanctuary ♦ WildEarth Guardians