

## For Immediate Release

January 4, 2021

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The US Forest Service announced today that they will be publishing a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on January 15, 2021, for the controversial Resolution Copper proposal to destroy Oak Flat by building a large underground copper mine.

The US Forest Service admitted in a recent meeting with concerned groups that it is bowing to political pressure to expedite the publication of a FEIS on Resolution Copper's proposal to destroy Oak Flat and thousands of additional acres of sacred land to build a huge underground copper mine. The motivation for this pressure is that Resolution Copper and its supporters would like the land privatized while the current presidential administration is still in power.

"At every step of the NEPA process, we've cautioned the Forest Service to follow their laws and regulations and not bow to Resolution Copper and their supporters," Roger Featherstone, Director of the Arizona Mining Reform Coalition said. "At every step, the Forest has let us down. The Forest Service decision to rush the release of the FEIS on January 15 shows us just how flawed the Resolution Copper process has been and just how eager Rio Tinto and BHP have been to prioritize their project over the protection of our cultural and ecological heritage. Instead of rushing out a flawed FEIS, the Tonto National Forest needs to write an updated and complete Draft Environmental Impact Statement before rushing to judgement."

In most cases the publication of an FEIS would not, in itself, be critical, but because of language in the Oak Flat land exchange law, this FEIS will trigger a 60-day deadline to turn over Oak Flat to Resolution Copper. If the Forest Service publishes the FEIS on January 15, 2021, Oak Flat could become the private property of the world's two largest mining companies within weeks.

Losing Oak Flat would be a tragedy beyond compare. Not only would it be the first time the US government has given a sacred site to a foreign mining company, but it would be the largest loss of public climbing and recreational opportunity in US history.

"After the destruction wrought by these mining companies in Bougainville, Juukan Gorge and countless other sacred lands across the world, it is clear that Rio Tinto & BHP cannot be trusted," said Henry Munoz, Sr., Chairperson of the Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition from Superior, Arizona.] "These companies and their allies say

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‘never again,’ yet continue to threaten Oak Flat here in Arizona. They don’t care about protecting our town’s water, Indigenous and cultural heritage and by association, apparently, neither does the US Forest Service.”

Because the FEIS is being released early under political pressure, decisions to give permits to Resolution Copper to build the mine would be based on a flawed, incomplete, and rushed analysis.

It’s clear that more analysis and public comment is needed before the FEIS is released. That’s why in April of this year, the Forest Service decided to push the target date for publication of the FEIS to December of 2021.

There are many things that are still incomplete:

- On December 15, 2020, the president's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation sent a letter to the Forest Service asking for a complete reworking of the PA process. The Forest Service is sidestepping the Advisory Council’s recommendations in its rush to get the FEIS published.
- There are many unanswered questions remaining about the viability and safety of the Forest Service’s decision to move the tailings dump needed to store billions of gallons of toxic waste to the Dripping Springs watershed. The public has not been provided a good faith opportunity to comment on the location of the tailings facility and related infrastructure routes.
- There are no solid answers to how the proposed mine would find enough water to run the mine without depriving communities, agriculture, and the environment with water under Arizona’s severe drought conditions.
- Although mitigating all of the vast damage caused by the proposed mine is impossible, the Forest Service is still required to provide mitigation measures to lessen the damage. These mitigation measures are incomplete and.
- The appraisals required to make sure the land exchange is not a rip off to the American taxpayer are far from complete. By law, the appraisals must be released to the public before the land exchange can be completed.

Once the FEIS is released, Resolution Copper is planning to conduct a feasibility study to determine whether a mine is even possible. The company should have written a feasibility study years ago and should be required to provide a completed feasibility study for analysis in the FEIS.

The entire Resolution Copper proposal is a failed experiment. There is no guarantee that if Resolution Copper is given Oak Flat, they would even be able to build a mine. In fact, Resolution Copper says that they don’t yet know whether the project is feasible.