

# SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBE

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## Coalition Opposes New “Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act of 2013

*San Carlos Apache Tribe, Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition, Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter and Arizona Mining Reform Coalition Unite to Oppose Land Swap.*

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*San Carlos, Arizona.* Today, Representatives Paul Gosar (R, AZ District 4) and Ann Kirkpatrick (D, AZ District 1) re-introduced the “Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act of 2013,” formerly H.R. 1904 in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.

“It is outrageous that members of our Arizona Congressional delegation support a land swap that benefits a foreign mega-mining giant over what’s best for Arizona,” said Terry Rambler, Chairman, San Carlos Apache Tribe. “Resolution Copper Mining (RCMO), owned by Rio Tinto which does business with Iran, wants to blast a 7,000 foot deep, massive block-cave mine into sacred land in the Tonto National Forest. This land was set aside in 1955 by President Eisenhower for its religious, cultural, traditional, recreational and archeological significance.

“We, along with many tribes, and recreational and environmental organizations, have opposed this land swap and the mine for more than seven years. Arizona cannot afford this deal. The mine would be an environmental disaster on an unprecedented scale and the job claims made by the copper company are unsubstantiated. As Apaches, we will continue to fight to preserve this land for all Arizonans.”

The Chairman emphasized that the real cost of this bill is not jobs, but desecration and destruction of a significant sacred site. He also expressed concern that the extraction process would consume voluminous amounts of water. “Toxins released into

groundwater by the block-cave mining process can contaminate our water supply throughout our region,” Chairman Rambler noted.

Tribes throughout the U.S. have joined the San Carlos Apache Tribe to oppose the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act of 2013. The member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Councils of both Arizona and Nevada oppose this bill as does the National Congress of American Indians, Great Plains Tribal Chairman’s Association, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, All Indian Pueblo Council of New Mexico, and United South and Eastern Tribes. Many Apache Tribes, including Fort McDowell Yavapai Apache, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Jicarilla Apache Tribe and Mescalero Apache Tribe are also opposed to this legislation, as is the Navajo Nation and others.

In addition to Tribal opposition, the proposed legislation is also strongly opposed by major environmental groups including the Access Fund, Arizona Mining Reform Coalition, Tucson Audubon Society, Friends of Ironwood Forest, Earthworks, and Sierra Club. The land is used by recreationists, hikers, and campers and is one of the nation’s premiere rock climbing sites.

Said Don Steuter, Conservation Chair for the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter, “This bill is nothing more than special interest legislation for a foreign mining corporation. It allows Rio Tinto to privatize public, sacred lands, including Oak Flat, which are of incalculable value to Native Americans, birders, rock climbers, and endangered species. And it does this by sidestepping a cornerstone of our environmental laws – the National Environmental Policy Act. We strongly oppose this bill and we are disappointed that some in our congressional delegation are once again trying to bypass the public and push through this bad deal. This legislation will harm our lands and provide little return to the American public.”

RCM has lobbied Congress to enact this land swap since 2004. The legislation would mandate the Secretary of Agriculture to transfer more than 2,400 acres of the Oak Flat Campground and surrounding public land in the Tonto National Forest to RCM. RCM has indicated it will use the block-cave mining technique to extract the copper from Arizona public lands, a process that will destroy huge swaths of land in the Tonto National Forest and consume more than 40,000 acre feet of water yearly. In addition to the massive water withdrawal, the process will release toxins through the mining process that can contaminate and further deplete Arizona’s precious and limited water supply.

RCM is owned by Rio Tinto PLC (United Kingdom) and BHP Billiton Ltd (Australia). Rio Tinto is partially owned by the Government of China. Because the proposal does not require that copper assets be kept in the U.S., China, and not the U.S., is positioned to be the chief beneficiary of the copper and other materials removed from the mine. Rio Tinto also does business with the Iran Foreign Investment Corporation, a wholly owned company of Iran. Rio Tinto and IFIC are partnering in a uranium mine in Africa.

Rio Tinto and RCM have opposed any changes to the bill that would require the corporation to hire Arizonans and use Arizona resources in the operation. In addition, the bill avoids both an environmental assessment and public interest determination.

“Resolution and its political allies don’t tell you that the land exchange sidesteps critical safeguards provided by other federal laws,” said Roy Chavez of Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition. “Arizona’s senators and representatives should be cautious. If passed, this bill may leave Arizona with nothing but a massive hole in the ground and a huge cleanup bill costing the American taxpayers billions of dollars. That would be a most unfortunate legacy for Representatives Gosar and Kirkpatrick, as well as Senator McCain.”