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News Release

Statement by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015

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WASHINGTON DC - Today Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell issued the following statement related to the public lands provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act, which designates nearly 250,000 acres of wilderness in five Western states, expands or designates nearly a dozen national park units and protects roughly 140 miles of wild and scenic rivers. The bill supports the 2016 National Park Centennial effort through new funding, expansion of the system and reauthorization of critical park programs, including Heritage Areas and the protection of American Battlefields.

Jewell also commented on language that provides for the exchange of a 2,422 acre parcel of U.S. Forest Service land to Resolution Copper Mining, LLC for a number of parcels in Arizona to be managed by the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management. The Oak Flat area, or Chi'Chil'Ba'Goteel, has significant religious, cultural, historical, and archeological value to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other tribes in the region.

Secretary Jewell Statement:

"I applaud the many members of Congress who worked on this bill to strengthen our nation's public lands and to build the support for our nation's second century of conservation. The legislation enacted 70 public lands proposals, many of which were the result of communities working with members of Congress to establish protection for places important to local economies, histories and people.

"There's a lot more to do to when it comes to ensuring that our national parks and public lands reflect the full diversity, history and natural beauty of our country. I'm hopeful that this progress is the kind of bipartisan support we can expect in the next two years when it comes to protecting special places for the next generation.

"With that said, I am profoundly disappointed with the Resolution Copper provision, which has no regard for lands considered sacred by nearby Indian tribes. The provision short circuits the long-standing and fundamental practice of pursuing meaningful government-to-government consultation with the 566 federally recognized tribes with whom we have a unique legal and trust responsibility.

"Although there are consultation requirements in the legislation, the appropriate time for honoring our government-to-government relationship with tribes is before legislating issues of this magnitude. The tribe's sacred land has now been placed in great jeopardy.

"I look forward to working with Rio Tinto to better understand their plans for development and to see what additional measures they can take to work with the tribes, including forgoing development in these sacred areas."