

Joint Statement

The Spirit of the Mountain Runners Apache Stronghold

Encampment to protect Chich'il Bildagoteel

Chich'il Bildagoteel (also known as Oak Flat) is a sacred site for our Apache people and many other Native Americans. This is a place that has special significance— a place where we pray, collect water and medicinal plants for ceremonies, gather acorns and other foods, and honor those that are buried here. We have never lost our relationship to Chich'il Bildagoteel, though the U.S. Government, at times in our history, has imprisoned us on our Reservations and not allowed us to come here.

We have established an encampment to protect the Holy Ground at Chich'il Bildagoteel with its four crosses, representing the entire surrounding sacred area, including its water, animals, oak trees, and other plants central to our tribal identity. The four crosses are now part of the body of Chich'il Bildagoteel.

We will remain here until the following conditions are met:

1. Chich'il Bildagoteel remains under federal protection.
2. That the U.S. Government recognize that responsibility for this site belongs to the native tribes to which it is sacred, to be protected jointly with the U.S. Forest Service, and that the Federal Government, working closely with effected Tribes, develops a plan by which all Sacred Sites are similarly protected.
3. We recognize that it will take time for the Forest Service, on behalf of the United States, to negotiate a joint plan for the protection of Chich'il Bildagoteel. We expect that the Forest Service not sign any agreements or permits with Resolution Copper while these negotiations are taking place.
4. We expect a reply from the US Forest Service within 7 business days from the delivery of this statement.

Our children and future generations will be destroyed along with the water, which is life, without Chich'il Bildagoteel intact. Our religion and cultural ways will be relegated to pages in a book rather than being a living, breathing process.

Chich'il Bildagoteel is threatened by the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act. In more recent years, a private mining company (Resolution Copper, a creation of Rio Tinto, UK and BHP Billiton, Australia) has persistently attempted to remove this sacred land from the protection of the federal government and take title to it. Resolution Copper would destroy the structural integrity of the land, causing the dramatic collapse of the land surface, the contamination and substantial depletion of the water table in southeast Arizona, and the destruction of the animal and plant life in the area. All of these effects desecrate land sacred for

our people for countless generations. In addition, the privatization of Chich'il Bildagoteel would block our access to a site crucial to the cultural and religious identity of our peoples.

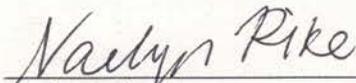
Resolution Copper could have applied for a permit to mine the ore on land that remained public—a process that would have required cultural, religious, and environmental impact studies before any mining could begin. Instead, Resolution Copper and its congressional allies attached a rider to the National Defense Authorization Act knowing that the normal process would not be successful. The Exchange has been opposed by every council of the tribes affected, in addition to the National Council of American Indians, Inter-Tribal Councils from across the country, and a host of religious/human rights, environmental, and recreational groups. In addition, since 1955, land involved in the Exchange has been protected from mining by the Executive Orders of Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon. President Eisenhower's, withdrawal order led the Apache people to believe that Chich'il Bildagoteel was protected for us for all time allowing us to continue our ancient ceremonies.

In December 2014, the congressional allies of this foreign, private mining company succeeded in passing the Land Exchange bill by bundling it with a number of other public land bills and attaching it to the National Defense Authorization Act. Congressional allies of Resolution Copper disallowed any amendments that could have excluded the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange from the package.

Given the history of our removal from our sacred lands, the violent repression of our peoples by the U.S. military, and countless broken treaties, this act of Congress, especially its attachment to a military authorization act, constitutes a human and religious rights violation that re-traumatizes our people. It demonstrates a profound disrespect to our religion, cultural traditions, and our peoples—the first inhabitants of the land. This is not the act of a government that claims to hold our land in trust for its protection and ours.

If the federal government will not protect this sacred land, we will.

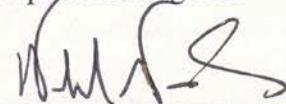
Signed,



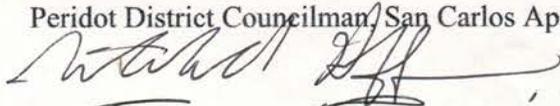
Naelyn Pike
Spirit of the Mountain Runners



Carrie Reede
Apache Stronghold



Wendler Nosie, Sr.
Peridot District Councilman, San Carlos Apache Tribe



MITCHELL HOFFMAN, SEVEN MILE DISTRICT COUNCILMAN



FRED FERREIRA, PERIDOT DISTRICT COUNCILMAN