



SIERRA CLUB

GRAND CANYON

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Trump Administration Plans to Advance Land Swap that will Destroy Sacred Lands

(Phoenix, AZ) On April 17th, the Trump administration [announced plans](#) to advance a land swap that will give international mining giant Rio Tinto control over Oak Flat on the Tonto National Forest. The announcement comes in advance of the release of a final environmental impact statement and decision in 60 days that will facilitate the land exchange and the destructive Resolution Copper Mine. The administration is moving forward despite the fact that Apache Stronghold has a religious freedom challenge to the exchange that is currently being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In response Sandy Bahr, director for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter stated:

"Advancing this land swap sets the stage for the destruction of Oak Flat, a place that is sacred to Indigenous people, including the Apache, and is on the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property, the *Chí'chil Bildagoteel* historic district. It is a world-class recreational area and a place of significant biological diversity. Sierra Club stands in solidarity with the Apache people, faith leaders, and other conservation groups in opposition to the land exchange and the proposed mine. We will not stop fighting to protect this critical area."

Curt Shannon, Interim Director for Arizona Mining Reform Coalition (AMRC) added:

"I can hardly think of a less-deserving mine project. All of the profits from the mine will flow offshore to the foreign mining conglomerates who own the project. All of the copper will be shipped offshore for smelting (likely to China) due to smelting capacity issues in the USA. The mine will use nearly half a trillion gallons of water that we desperately need for other uses in Arizona. All that we will get is a huge hole in the ground and 1.5 billion tons of toxic mine tailings that need to be impounded in perpetuity."

Background:

International mining giant, Rio Tinto, is proposing the Resolution Copper Mine east of Superior, Arizona on the Tonto National Forest and traditional lands of the Western Apache. The mine would destroy Oak Flat, including the campground and thousands of additional acres of public land. The project includes an underground block cave mine that would create a crater roughly two miles wide and 1,000 feet deep right there at Oak Flat due to subsidence of the land. The mine would also dump nearly 1.5 billion tons of toxic mining waste into an unlined tailings dump -- the preferred alternative tailings site will ultimately cover six square miles with a dam 490 feet high. This mine would use significant amounts of water -- enough to supply the City of Tempe, Arizona, for 40 years. At a time when the state is facing an existential water crisis and climate

change, it is unwise to allow this water-intensive use of public lands.

For more than a decade, Resolution Copper pursued legislation in the U.S. Congress to facilitate an exchange of Oak Flat for other lands with Resolution Copper but was only able to win its passage when it was included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of FY2015. Subsequent to the passage of this proposed exchange as part of the NDAA, the Forest Service initiated the National Environmental Policy Act process and developed a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) on the project and a record of decision (ROD) was rushed out in the waning days of the Trump administration. The Biden Administration withdrew the FEIS and ROD for additional consultation with the affected Tribes.

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