

## **Please Support H.R. 1884, The Save Oak Flat Act**

July 8, 2021

Dear Member of Congress,

We write on behalf of the undersigned conservation, Indigenous, and religious groups representing millions of members and supporters to urge you to support H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act. This bill repeals authorization of a land exchange that would facilitate the proposed Resolution Copper Mine, a project that would result in the destruction of a Native American sacred area called Oak Flat, or Chi'chil Bildagoteel, and cause significant environmental harm to wildlife, public lands and regional water supplies.

Located in the Tonto National Forest in central Arizona, Oak Flat is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its irreplaceable cultural, historical and religious importance for the Western Apache and other Tribes. Oak Flat is part of the ancestral homelands of not only the Apache, but also the Yavapai, Hopi, Zuni and other Tribes in the Southwest. The National Congress of American Indians, the largest and oldest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization and the Inter-Tribal Association of Arizona, representing 21 tribal governments in Arizona, support the protection of Oak Flat and oppose the land transfer.

The irreplaceable cultural resources at Oak Flat and the surrounding lands that are part of the 2,422-acre exchange would be destroyed by the mine as they sink into a crater almost two miles wide and 1,000 feet deep. The area also has a highly visited campground, world-renowned rock-climbing sites and is popular with other recreationists; it provides habitat for hundreds of migratory birds and a diverse array of other species, some of which are endangered.

The proposed mine, a limited liability corporation owned by Rio Tinto and BHP, would cause extensive dewatering of fragile, finite aquifers over a 300-square-mile area in a state that is already facing severe water shortages from an unrelenting drought, and it risks polluting ground and surface waters that would threaten the area's people and wildlife alike. In all, 15,000 acres — 23 square miles — of wildlands would be destroyed and hundreds of billions of gallons of water permanently removed from regional aquifers that many Arizona towns and farmers rely on.

The Oak Flat area was withdrawn from mineral entry more than 60 years ago by President Eisenhower in recognition of its high value to the American people. It is this prohibition on mining that Rio Tinto and BHP seek to evade by obtaining possession of the land directly. The

proposed land exchange legislation failed to pass Congress in 5 previous attempts starting in 2005 under careful congressional consideration and much debate. It was only through a literal midnight rider that the land exchange was authorized by attaching it to the unrelated must-pass 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 3003) without any debate.

The rider mandated completion of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to be published prior to consummation of a land exchange. Unfortunately, the FEIS was fast-tracked by the former Trump administration and includes numerous deficiencies that violate the National Environmental Policy Act and other federal laws. In March the Biden administration withdrew the FEIS and put the exchange on hold.

However, if the land-exchange legislation is not repealed, Oak Flat will be transferred from public ownership into the private hands of Resolution Copper no later than 60 days after a revised FEIS is published, potentially later this year, regardless of the environmental harms disclosed in the document. Oak Flat would be forever lost to current and future generations of Tribal members and the broader American public.

This land is important to all Americans, but none more so than the Western Apache peoples, generations of whom have used it for ceremony, healing and sustenance across the centuries and continue to do so to this day. Important religious ceremonies that cannot take place anywhere else are still held at Oak Flat.

A sacred area such as Oak Flat should never be traded away to an international mining company for profit: It was an egregious error for Congress to authorize this land exchange in the first place. We urge you to help correct that mistake by supporting H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act, and working to get this legislation passed as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Anthropocene Alliance  
Arizona Faith Network  
Arizona Mining Reform Coalition  
Avalon Gardens  
Avalon Organic Gardens & EcoVillage  
Avalon Universal Enterprises  
Azul  
Chispa Arizona  
Citizen Anthropocene Alliance  
Citizens Committee for Flood Relief  
Claiborne Avenue Alliance  
Coalition for Wetlands and Forests  
Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim

Concerned Citizens Retired Miners Coalition  
Conservation Council For Hawaii  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earth Ethics, Inc.  
Earthjustice  
Earthworks  
EcoFlight  
Education, Economics, Environmental,  
Climate and Health Organization (EECHO)  
Elders Climate Action - Arizona Chapter  
Endangered Habitats League  
Environment America  
Environmental Protection Information Center

Fairy Forest Lane  
Franciscan Action Network  
Freshwater Future  
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness  
Friends of Santa Cruz River  
Friends of the Earth  
Friends of the Land of Keweenaw  
Gateway Neighborhood Association, Mt.  
Shasta  
Gila Resources Information Project  
Global Change Music  
Global Community Communications  
Alliance  
Grand Junction Area chapter- Great Old  
Broads for Wildlife  
Great Basin Resource Watch  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
GreenLatinos  
Groundswell  
High Country Conservation Advocates  
Higher Ground  
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and  
the Outdoors (HECHO)  
Howling For Wolves  
Indigenous education Institute  
Information Network for Responsible Mining  
International Marine Mammal Project of  
Earth Island Institute  
John Muir Project  
Klamath Forest Alliance  
Lafayette Parish Flood Forum  
Laguna Acoma Coalition For A Safe  
Environment  
League of Conservation Voters  
London Mining Network  
Lost Coast League  
LowCountry Flooded States of America  
Malach Consulting  
Mauna Kea Education and Awareness  
Mount Graham Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness  
Northern Jaguar Project  
Nuclear Information and Resource Service  
NY4WHALES

Ocean City, Flooding Committee, Chapter of  
Higher Ground  
Oceanic Preservation Society  
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
Oyu Tolgoi Watch  
Patagonia Area Resource Alliance  
PopUP Forest  
Pueblo Action Alliance  
Rachel Carson Council  
Residents Working Against Huron River  
Flooding  
Rosewood Strong  
Santa Fe Forest Coalition  
Save James Island  
Save Lake Superior Association  
Save Our Sky Blue Waters  
Save our Soundside, Inc.  
Save the Dells  
Save the Scenic Santa Ritas  
Sierra Club  
SoCal 350 Climate Action  
Soulistic Hospice  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
Stop Elmhurst Flooding  
Sunrise Tucson  
Suppressed Histories Archives  
The Rewilding Institute  
The Wilderness Society  
Tucson Audubon Society  
Tucson Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
Turtle Island Restoration Network  
UASPR  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
United Pillars of Aloha  
WaterLegacy  
Watershed Management Group  
Weber Sustainability Consulting  
West Street Recovery  
Western Environmental Law Center  
Western Watersheds Project  
Wild Arizona  
WildEarth Guardians