

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2019/08/12/stories/1060930963>

Resolution Copper moves toward final environmental approval

[Dylan Brown](#), E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, August 12, 2019

The entrance to the No. 10 shaft, a nearly 7,000-foot hole dug by Resolution Copper Co., leads to one of the world's largest copper deposits. Resolution Copper

An Arizona copper mine has moved another step closer to construction, despite persistent concerns about nearby sacred Native American sites and environmental impacts.

On Friday, the Forest Service released the [draft environmental impact statement](#) (DEIS) for the proposed Resolution Copper project, 60 miles east of Phoenix.

The permitting process started in 2013, but the project required a controversial land swap, approved as a rider Arizona lawmakers attached to a 2014 defense appropriations bill ([Greenwire](#), March 23, 2016).

As a condition of the swap, the Tonto National Forest issued a special management plan for Apache Leap — high, jagged cliffs that are part of an area near the town of Superior known as Oak Flat.

But the plan did not allay concerns for the San Carlos Apache and other tribes that consider the site sacred, or environmentalists worried about impacts on endangered species and water ([E&E News PM](#), Jan. 5, 2018).

Forest Service officials' "preferred alternative" would shift the planned site of Resolution Copper's 4,000-acre "tailings" storage pond for mine waste. According to the DEIS, the Skunk Camp location would be farther from neighboring homes, next to an existing mine, and would require a smaller dam.

Majority owners Rio Tinto PLC and BHP Billiton Ltd. have already invested \$2 billion in developing the project, including recent funding to rehabilitate an existing mine shaft and begin work on a second.

"Resolution has the potential to supply up to 25% of the United States' copper demand and complements Rio Tinto's other copper projects," Rio Tinto Chief Executive for Copper and Diamonds Arnaud Soirat said. "Long-term copper fundamentals remain strong — with supply challenged and demand driven by the adoption of electric vehicles, the electrification of industry and a growing share of renewables in the energy mix."

Mining opponents continue to fight the project.

In Congress, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) sponsored [H.R. 665](#) to repeal the land swap. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) sponsored a companion bill, [S. 173](#).

"The damage this proposed mine would do is broad, deep and irreversible," said Randy Serraglio, conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The DEIS is subject to a 90-day public comment period ending Nov. 7.

"We'll work through the public comment process with a team of experts and an army of concerned citizens to thoroughly analyze the draft environmental impact statement and push back against this nightmare proposal," Serraglio said.