

## US Forest Service issues review of underground Arizona mine

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PHOENIX ?D The U.S. Forest Service on Friday issued a draft environmental review of a proposed underground copper mine in the mountains east of Phoenix, saying it favors an alternative that would keep the project's tailings in a more remote area.

The release of the report kicks off a 90-day review period that includes five hearings seeking public comment.

Native American tribes and conservation groups historically have opposed the Resolution Copper Mine project, fearing it could harm sacred sites and the environment.

The area is home to the endangered hedgehog cactus and the threatened western yellow-billed cuckoo. The San Carlos Apache and other tribes have said the area includes ceremonial and burial lands.

Resolution company officials said Friday they accept the Forest Service's choice of an alternative tailings area called Skunk Camp. They also said they have been working with tribes to identify important sites to ease the project's impacts.

Hesston Klenk, manager of governance for the Rio Tinto mining corporation that is helping head up the Resolution project, said the public can comment on every aspect of the environmental review.

Resolution would generally have a smaller imprint than the more traditional open-pit mines common around Arizona. Resolution plans to use block-cave mining to dig underneath the ore body and set off explosions to break the ore apart.

Randy Serraglio, conservation advocate at the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity, said that even with an underground mine "there is no place you can hide billions of tons of toxic waste."

He said his group will ask the agency to extend the 90-day period to allow time for a more comprehensive study of the environmental review.

Vicky Pacey, senior permitting manager for the Resolution project, said the Skunk Camp alternative is located south of the project behind an earlier open pit mine.

Pacey said nearby residents demanded that the tailings be piled up where they won't see them, "and the Forest Service listened."

Copper is among Arizona's most abundant resources and remains a vital part of the economy.

A federal judge in Tucson late last month overturned Forest Service approval of plans for the open pit Rosemont copper mine in southeastern Arizona. Tribal and environmental groups opposed the plan, which was much further along than Resolution.

Toronto-based Hudbay Minerals Inc. is appealing the decision on Rosemont.