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# Forest Service To Initiate Oak Flat Land Swap For Copper Mine Jan. 15

By [Ryan Heinsius](#) • Jan 7, 2021

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The Trump administration will begin the final steps of a controversial land swap with a mining company in Arizona in a little more than a week. The Oak Flat area is a tribal sacred site and has been at the center of a fierce battle for nearly a decade. KNAU's Ryan Heinsius reports.

On Jan. 15 the U.S. Forest Service will begin the process of transferring nearly 2,500 acres to Rio Tinto for what will become one of the largest copper mines in the country. The company says the campsite at Oak Flat (pictured) will remain open for decades as work on the mine proceeds. Tribal and environmental groups say much of the surrounding land, sacred to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, will be destroyed.

Credit Ryan Heinsius / KNAU

Tonto National Forest officials will release the final environmental impact statement for the land exchange on Jan. 15. It's a necessary step for Resolution Copper, part of the global mining company Rio Tinto, to be granted title of the nearly 2,500-acre area no more than 60 days later.

According to environmental groups like the Center for Biological Diversity, it's part of a Trump administration pattern to accelerate oil, gas and mineral extraction on public lands before the end of the president's term. The U.S. Forest Service, however, says work on the Oak Flat land swap merely took less time than earlier estimates.

When the Resolution mine is operational, it'll be one of the largest and deepest copper mines in the U.S. The San Carlos Apache Tribe says the impacts will be catastrophic to the Oak Flat area, which is a sacred site and has been used for ceremonial and spiritual practices for centuries.

According to Rio Tinto, the company is dedicated to engagement with tribal groups to protect cultural heritage while diversifying the local economy.