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## Trump admin to approve Ariz. land swap in final week

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Published: Tuesday, January 5, 2021



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

One of the Trump administration's final actions could be initiating the land transfer of an Apache holy site in Arizona to copper miners.

The Forest Service said yesterday it will begin the transfer of 2,422 acres in the Tonto National Forest to Anglo-Australian mining companies Rio Tinto PLC and BHP Group Ltd. on Jan. 15, five days before President Trump leaves office.

Congress mandated in 2014 that the federal government give the Oak Flat parcel to the mining companies in exchange for 5,344 acres across Arizona ([\*Greenwire\*](#), Dec. 9, 2020).

By law, the transaction must be completed within 60 days of publication of an environmental impact statement. That document will evaluate the effects of the Resolution Copper project, a proposed underground mine that would cause a site sacred to the San Carlos Apache Tribe to cave into a crater about 1.8 miles wide.

"The Tonto National Forest plans to publish the final EIS and draft [record of decision] concurrently on Jan. 15, but it may be subject to change," said Forest Service spokesperson Babete Anderson in an email yesterday.

Records of decision generally determine the fates of natural resources projects requiring federal approval. But Rio Tinto and BHP will likely own Oak Flat before the Forest Service makes a final decision.

Last month, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, an independent federal agency, found problems with the Forest Service's tribal consultation regarding the Resolution Copper project.

ACHP is participating in the Forest Service's National Historic Preservation Act compliance, which requires a programmatic agreement signed by both parties as well as Resolution Copper and the state historic preservation office.

Anderson told E&E News in November that the signed programmatic agreement would be included in the environmental impact statement.

But last month, ACHP's director, Reid Nelson, said he "would have serious concerns" about executing the agreement if the Forest Service didn't take the council's recommendations on tribal consultation into account ([\*\*E&E News PM\*\*](#), Dec. 23, 2020).

Now Anderson says the Forest Service will include the version of the historic preservation agreement that it "circulated for signatures," not necessarily a signed one.