Oak Creek Canyon
Photo credit: Deborah Lee Soltesz, USFS, Coconino National Forest

OAK CREEK CANYON, ARIZONA

THE PLACE:

Oak Creek Canyon is a verdant, biodiverse red-rock river canyon flowing south through Sedona from northern Arizona's rugged Mogollon Rim. It was originally withdrawn from mineral development in 1999 but those protections lapsed in 2019. In July 2024 the Bureau of Land Management reinstated a two-year mining ban, to be in place until another proposed 20-year mining ban could be enacted following a public comment period.

WHY IT'S SPECIAL:

Oak Creek Canyon is renowned for scenery, recreation and biodiversity. More than 2 million people travel through Oak Creek Canyon each year or visit its state park, campgrounds, picnic areas, viewpoints, trailheads or visitor center. With springs and lush riparian vegetation and adjoining woodlands, Oak Creek Canyon harbors regionally and globally significant biodiversity. Among its 1,200 species of plants and 250 animal species are dozens of protected birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrate and plants. Threatened and endangered species include Gila trout, Mexican spotted owls and narrow-headed garter snakes. The canyon also provides habitat for spikedace, loach minnows, northern Mexican garter snakes and Mexican gray wolves, and is home to a mayfly found nowhere else on Earth.

Oak Creek and its tributaries provide downstream drinking water supplies. Members of the Apache, Navajo, Yavapai-Apache and Hopi Tribes gather traditional plants and other materials from Oak Creek Canyon and have described it as a sacred place.

THE STAKES:

The Trump administration could abandon the two-year mining ban and proposed withdrawal, opening Oak Creek Canyon to uranium mining. Because the canyon is generally narrow, mining activity would occur near or within Oak Creek, its important habitats, and its popular recreation areas. Mining activities and their effects — including noise, dust, lights, truck traffic, waste ponds and mining infrastructure — would destroy wildlife habitat, harm recreation, and deplete and pollute the water that communities and wildlife depend on.