

Dear Members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources,

I am honored to address you on behalf of Apache Stronghold, an Arizona-based community organization dedicated to connecting Apache and other Native and non-Native allies in the effort to preserve Native culture and religious identity. We are here today to speak to the threat to Chi'chil Bildagoteel, also known as Oak Flat, an Apache sacred site at grave risk at the hands of foreign copper mining developers.

Oak Flat is Holy ground. For countless generations, Western Apaches have prayed, conducted religious ceremonies, and buried our dead in this sacred space. Oak Flat is our home and the seat of our religious exercise as both Natives and Americans. It is the place where we spiritually connect with the *Creator* and the *Ga'an*, the holy spirits that commune with us in our religious rituals. And it is where our young girls have their *Sunrise Ceremonies* and undergo spiritual rebirth into womanhood.

The government has chosen to give the land surrounding Oak Flat to a foreign-owned mining operation to create a copper mine that will indisputably and permanently destroy our historical place of worship—swallowing it in a massive crater nearly 1,000 feet deep and 2 miles wide. We're confronted by an unthinkable fate – our portal to the Creator being closed forever in a relentless quest for resources and profit. This will completely devastate our people's spiritual lifeblood and break our connection to our ancestors.

While we are chiefly concerned with the religious practice and freedom of our people, we also recognize that this committee is responsible for overseeing the nation's energy and mineral policy amidst a broader national security landscape. Through our years of litigation with Resolution Copper, we have grown a deeper appreciation for the national security concerns their Arizona project raises. Through independent reporting, it has been discovered that Resolution Copper and its parent companies have deep ties to China and the Chinese Communist Party through its mining operations worldwide. And while publicly the mine says it will supply domestic copper, Resolution Copper has quietly told courts and government agencies that America's lack of smelting capacity makes China the most desired and profitable place to sell its copper. We fully expect American copper to be sold to China for processing, price hikes, and resale to the US at a premium. This is amidst an already fragile critical mineral relationship with China, which just several years ago withheld vital minerals from us for political purposes. The idea of handing over our copper supplies to a foreign adversary weakens, not strengthens, our supply chains and undermines our national security.

We humbly ask the members of this committee to take into serious consideration both the threats the Western Apache people face in the preservation of our religious freedom and the national security concerns posed by Resolution Copper as they consider the future of Oak Flat.

Gratefully,
Wendsler Nosie, SR., Ph.D.
Co-Founder of Apache Stronghold
Former Chairman and Councilman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe