



National Wildlife Federation

Office of the President

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April 12, 2021

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

On behalf of the National Wildlife Federation, I'm writing to thank you for introducing H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act, and to express our strong support for this legislation. The National Wildlife Federation urges swift passage in order to prevent the destruction of Oak Flat—a Traditional Cultural Property listed on the National Register of Historic Places and located in the Tonto National Forest (TNF) in Southeastern Arizona—and the environmental devastation that would result if these public lands were to be developed into one of the largest mines in North America.

H.R. 1884 would repeal Sec. 3003, the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange, of the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This provision authorized the give-away of over 2,400 acres of Tonto National Forest land to Resolution Copper, which is jointly owned by foreign corporations Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton. These public lands had previously been withdrawn from mining for over 60 years. H.R. 1884 would also withdraw the Oak Flat area from the public land and mining laws to provide this area of environmental, historical, archeological, and religious significance with long-term protection.

Resolution Copper's proposed mining activities would not only obliterate Oak Flat, creating a 1.8-mile wide crater over a thousand feet deep, but would also deplete and contaminate water resources and wildlife in the area. The Oak Flat area provides vital habitat for endangered species and migratory birds. The mine will require massive amounts of dewatering of the area that will result in the loss of over 18 groundwater dependent ecosystems, which are irreplaceable habitat for wildlife.

Further, the proposed mine will require over 40 miles of pipeline through large swaths of the Tonto National Forest, including blasting through a mountain peak and building pipelines over canyons to slurry out toxic waste and ore concentrate. The proposed mine will also require the construction of massive utility and road corridors that could span 500 feet in width. Resolution Copper also plans to build a tailings storage facility on Arizona state trust land that will be as tall as the Washington Monument and potentially span over 15,000 acres. These proposed actions

will displace, jeopardize, and harm a wide array of wildlife—impacts we do not believe have been properly considered as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Section 3003 of the FY 2015 NDAA mandates the transfer of Oak Flat to Resolution Copper within 60 days of publication of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). On January 15, 2021, the Trump Administration rushed to issue a seriously flawed FEIS. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture has withdrawn the FEIS for now, the only way to permanently protect Oak Flat is for Congress to pass H.R. 1884.

The National Wildlife Federation strongly supports tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, self-determination, and the trust responsibility of the federal government to Tribes. Passage of this legislation is a necessary pathway to respecting these obligations and laws. Thank you for considering these views and for your efforts to protect Oak Flat.

Sincerely,



Collin O'Mara
President and CEO
National Wildlife Federation



Camilla Simon
Executive Director
Hispanics Enjoying Hunting, Camping, and the Outdoors (HECHO)