



April 13, 2021

**Via Email**

Chairperson Fernandez  
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Young  
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairperson Fernandez and Ranking Member Young:

I write to you on behalf of the members of the United Steelworkers (USW) union regarding today's hearing on H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act. We ask that this letter be put into the record for the hearing.

USW is the largest industrial union in North America and is the largest mining union in the country. Steelworkers mine iron ore, copper, potash, salt, sand, silver, palladium, and much more. Like many stakeholders, we have a unique view of this mining project and want to share it with the committee.

Our union opposes the legislation under consideration today, the Save Oak Flat Act (H.R. 1884), introduced by Rep. Grijalva, to repeal the Congressionally-approved land exchange legislation that would enable the Resolution Copper mine to move forward. This land exchange was under consideration by Congress for some time prior to being finalized in the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). It should remain in place to allow this important mining project to move forward.

Overall, copper is an important material that will play a key role in technologies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve efficiency in ways that are necessary for a future that mitigates the worst impacts of climate change. With the potential to supply up to one-quarter of the nation's copper demand, Resolution Copper will play a critical role in securing America's leadership in the global clean energy economy while creating good-paying union jobs for generations to come.

The majority shareholder in the Resolution Copper project is Rio Tinto, which is a union-represented company. The company currently operates one of the two remaining copper smelters in the United States. Resolution Copper will supply that highly efficient smelter at Kennecott in Utah, which is operated by USW members.

Our union has a long history with Rio Tinto that has had its ups and downs, but we are pleased that through an ongoing dialogue, Rio Tinto has agreed to neutrality on union organizing at the Resolution Copper project. In other words, the company will not oppose or interfere with workers at the facility joining together to form a union and collectively bargain over working conditions at the site. Should those workers opt to join USW, our union is committed to ensuring that the more than 1500 jobs are safe, high quality jobs with family-supporting wages and benefits that benefit the local community, like the jobs that our members have at Kennecott in Utah, and at other mining operations across the country.

Bearing in mind our nation's urgent need for copper, our union recognizes the importance of a circular economy and responsible mining in creating a low-carbon future. Responsible mining is the only viable future for the industry, and our union is actively working with environmental and industry partners to identify the qualities of a responsible mining project and a responsible mining company to ensure social responsibility, environmental responsibility, business integrity, and planning for positive legacies.

As we look at this project at Resolution Copper, we know that it will have national significance given its strategic ability to supply the United States with a critical mineral. Our union is eager to ensure that it is ultimately a responsible mining operation.

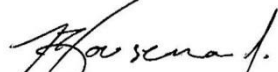
We have reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Statement from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and are closely following the Biden Administration's review of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Our union recognizes the importance of a thorough environmental impact analysis for this and any other proposed project. We were glad that USFS highlighted many important issues and described extensive engagement with stakeholders, including the tribes, across Arizona that resulted in design changes for the project. We encourage Rio Tinto to continue this ongoing stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the mine.

In our country, we seem to be deadlocked and conflicted around mining as an industry. These projects are often cast in binary terms – either you mine OR you

protect the environment. But in order to protect the environment from climate change, we must mine and we must do so in a way that respects the environment, workers, communities, indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective with you.

Sincerely,

  
Roy Houseman Jr.  
Legislative Director

CC: Chairman Grijalva, House Committee on Natural Resources  
Ranking Member Westerman, House Committee on Natural Resources