

**EARTHWORKS**

April 19, 2021

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

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

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of our tens of thousands of members, many of whom come from mining-impacted communities, to thank you for this hearing on H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act. Earthworks encourages all Members of Congress to vote for this crucial piece of legislation in order to protect Chi'chil Bildagoteel (Oak Flat) from mining, which would devastate areas both sacred and ecologically unique.

We remain steadfast that Congress must protect Oak Flat from mining, just as Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon believed.<sup>1</sup> This operator, Resolution Copper, has promised to achieve consent of Indigenous communities. Yet, their majority owner, Rio Tinto, made similar promises before destroying the Juukan Gorge in Australia on the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) peoples' land.<sup>2</sup> Juukan Gorge was deeply sacred to the PKKP peoples, who continuously inhabited the area for 46,000 years. Despite resignations of high-level officials, Rio Tinto still appears ready to risk the same destruction at Oak Flat.

The threat of Resolution Copper's destruction of Oak Flat has hung heavy over the San Carlos Apache and other nearby Indigenous tribes for far too long. This is a place they and their culture originated from, further back than recorded history.<sup>3</sup> Not only are their past and cosmologies rooted in Oak Flat, but the area itself remains used for multiple religious and medicinal purposes, including coming-of-age ceremonies.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, non-Indigenous people also utilize and love Oak Flat for camping, hiking, biking, and mountain climbing.<sup>5</sup> Destroying Oak Flat would be a blow to Arizona's tourism industry.

Congress has the responsibility to protect Chi'chil Bildagoteel, and this legislation is the perfect vehicle to do so. We join the San Carlos Apache, as well as the the Navajo Nation, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Hualapai Tribe, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, the Tonto Apache Tribe, the Cocopah Indian Tribe, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Hopi Tribe, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, all of whom have submitted individual letters or passed resolutions in support of the Save Oak Flat Act.

Thank you for your consideration.

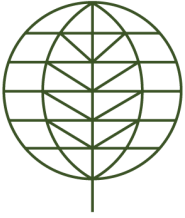
*Dedicated to protecting communities and the environment from the adverse impacts of mineral and energy development while promoting sustainable solutions.*

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- <sup>1</sup> “Selling Off Apache Holy Land,” [The New York Times](#)
- <sup>2</sup> “Rio Tinto blames 'misunderstanding' for destruction of 46,000-year-old Aboriginal site,” [The Guardian](#)
- <sup>3</sup> “Oak Flat,” [Sacred Land Film Project](#)
- <sup>4</sup> “This land is sacred to the Apache, and they are fighting to save it,” [The Washington Post](#)
- <sup>5</sup> “Climbers and Tribes Join Forces to Save Oak Flat,” [Access Fund](#)

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