



POARCH BAND of CREEK INDIANS

April 21, 2021

The Honorable Jerry Carl
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.
Attn: Chad.Carlough@mail.house.gov
Jordan.Howard@mail.house.gov
Laura.Stagno@mail.house.gov

re: Request to Support and Co-Sponsor H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act

Dear Representative Carl:

On behalf of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, I write to respectfully request that you consider supporting and co-sponsoring H.R. 1884, the Save Oak Flat Act. The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States held a hearing on this bill on April 13, 2021.

Chi'chil Biddagoteel, known as Oak Flat, is a Traditional Cultural Property listed on the National Register of Historic Places located in the Tonto National Forest (TNF) in southeastern Arizona. The Oak Flat area plays a vital role in tribal religion, tradition, and culture. Since time immemorial, native people have come to Oak Flat to participate in ceremonies, to pray, to gather medicines and ceremonial items, and to seek and obtain peace and personal cleansing.

Tribal leaders and allies have been working for over 18 years to protect the Oak Flat area from foreign mining conglomerates – Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton – who, through their joint venture Resolution Copper Mining, LLC, seek to develop the largest and deepest copper mine in North America. As part of a closed-door, backroom deal during the last days of a lame-duck Congress in December 2014, the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange (land exchange) was included as Section 3003 of the FY15 NDAA, P.L. 113-291. The land exchange transfers 2,422 acres of TNF land, including the sacred Oak Flat area, to Resolution Copper in exchange for Resolution Copper-owned parcels that will go to the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service.

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The copper that Resolution Copper seeks to extract from beneath Oak Flat would be owned by these foreign corporations, not the United States or American companies, and these foreign corporations would not be required to sell or process this copper in the United States. Further, the U.S. is not facing a shortage of domestically produced copper concentrate; and, in fact, in 2009 the U.S. was the fifth largest exporting nation in the world shipping [\\$2.34 billion worth](#) of copper ore abroad. Most likely, Resolution's copper concentrate is bound for China, which is by far the world's largest importer of copper ore. Rio Tinto's single largest investor is the government of China through Chinalco Mining Corporation International.

As part of the legislation, the land exchange is subject to NEPA (Sec. 3003 (c)(9)) as well as appraisals of the lands to be exchanged and public review of the appraisals (Sec. 3003(c)(4)). However, TNF failed to comply with NEPA and other applicable federal laws, and they failed to complete the required appraisals of the lands to be exchanged. Instead, TNF rushed to publish the Final EIS on Jan. 15, 2021, to artificially start a 60-day clock under Section 3003(c)(10) to give away sacred Oak Flat to Resolution Copper to pave the way for its mine that will destroy Oak Flat, large swaths of TNF, and other surrounding areas with no simultaneous commensurate conveyances of Resolution Copper-owned land to the federal government. On February 11, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) declined to sign the Programmatic Agreement under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 process preventing its execution, stating “[i]t is clear that the proposed undertaking would destroy significant historic properties, including the highly significant Oak Flat, and the measures in the PA are not sufficient to adequately resolve those adverse effects.”

On March 1, 2021, USDA directed the Forest Service to withdraw the Notice of Availability and rescind the FEIS and draft Record of Decision. USDA noted that rescinding the FEIS will ensure the Forest Service complies with “the environmental, cultural, and archaeological analyses required” and concluded that “additional time is necessary to fully understand concerns raised by Tribes and the public and the project’s impacts to these important resources and ensure the agency’s compliance with federal law.” Importantly, USDA noted that because the land exchange was directed under the FY15 NDAA that “long term protection of the site will likely require an act of Congress.”

Although flawed, the withdrawn FEIS acknowledged that Resolution Copper’s proposed mining activities will directly, adversely, and permanently affect numerous sacred springs, traditional areas, burial locations, and other cultural places and experiences of high spiritual and cultural value. The massive mine will also cause irreversible destruction to thousands of acres of public lands and contaminate already scarce water sources. The block-cave mining technique will create a 1.8-mile wide crater (from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial) over a thousand feet deep. The mine will consume more than 637,000 acre-feet of water and require over 40 miles of pipeline through large parts of the TNF to slurry out toxic waste and ore concentrate. It will also require the construction of massive utility and road corridors that could potentially span 500 feet in width. This mine will deplete and contaminate precious water resources in the region

and result in a toxic waste dump that will be taller than the Washington Monument and potentially span over 15,000 acres.

The Save Oak Flat Act will repeal Section 3003 and withdraw the Oak Flat area from mining laws to permanently protect this sacred area. We respectfully request that you support and cosponsor the Save Oak Flat Act. Protecting tribal sacred areas and cultural resources is essential to upholding the federal trust responsibility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie A. Bryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Bryan
Tribal Chair & CEO

