

## My Turn: Resolution Copper Needs to Move Forward - With Permits in Place

Superior is my hometown where my family has lived for generations. As its name implies, it is one of the most superior and scenic places in Arizona. From the surrounding mountains and canyons to trails and rock climbing to waterfalls, the magic of Superior's way of life can be felt. Superior is also a historic mining town where many critical mining engineering feats took place and where some of the world's largest copper deposits have been found. Revolutionary designs in mining like the first air conditioned mine and the longest and deepest single-lift mining shaft were constructed here. We are proud of our mining heritage, and as a community, we have a healthy respect and clear understanding for the challenges that the boom and bust cycles of mining have created for our community and our region.

Arizona's Copper Corridor is the equivalent of Yukon gold. Some of the richest and most accessible copper ore deposits are found here in eastern Pinal and southern Gila counties. Two of the three copper smelters left in the United States operate in our region. Mining belongs in this part of Arizona and it can be done responsibly while protecting the environment and the beautiful landscape that we love and cherish.

When the Resolution Copper project was introduced to Superior, it brought a glimmer of hope and opportunity to our small, close-knit community. Its predecessor, the Magma Mine, was shuttered in 1996 and opportunities were scarce for Superior to provide employment and business prospects for our diminishing population.

If the Resolution Copper projects comes to fruition, it will employ some of the most technologically advanced and modern mining techniques ever. It will have passed the most thorough and exhaustive environmental permitting ever and it will boast new jobs focused on robotics and other innovations that will make this the most sophisticated, advanced and environmentally sensitive mine in the United States.

This opportunity was critically important to the Town but not at the cost of the long-term sustainability of our community and protection of our precious environmental resources that makes us Superior. Our community goal has always been to be a town with a mine - not a mining town. This project helps us achieve this.

From the day this project was proposed, Superior chose to actively participate in the Resolution Copper Environmental Impact Statement. We chose to work with our Congressional delegation to bring to light areas that needed mitigation. We proactively engaged with officials at the Tonto National Forest and Environmental Protection Agency. We chose to stay at the table and negotiate with Resolution Copper to ensure that we had mitigation agreements in place to protect Superior's environment and socio-economic impact now and for generations to come.

Most importantly, the leadership of Superior understands that this ore body is not going to magically disappear; it will be mined and it should only be mined with the full permitting requirements of the environmental impact statements. Our active participation in the process affords me the confidence to unequivocally state that this mine must move forward for the betterment of Superior and our surrounding communities and to protect the precious environment that we revere.

Recent political maneuvers, fostered by opposition groups to reject the EIS, have created yet another roadblock to the progress of this mine and, ultimately, the future of Superior. If these opposition groups are successful, they will have opened up "Pandora's box", as the lands at Oak Flats will still be officially exchanged in March and the ore body will still be there.

With Resolution Copper in full ownership of the lands currently held by the federal government, they could still mine the property. However, their ownership of these lands will mean that they won't be required to do the extensive environmental permitting they were required to do under the parameters of the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act.

For years, the Town of Superior, and the people who reside here, have actively participated in this transparent process as supporters and, in some cases, in opposition to this project. Oak Flats is important to our community: it has been a place of recreation, family reunions, union picnics and cultural celebrations, but it is also the place that many have gone to work. They have toiled and labored to provide for their families. The work is sacred to them and their families. It is part of our community fabric.

Mining will always be part of our economic DNA and will forever be critical to Arizona's economy and to our national defense. Copper powers everything from our televisions to our smart phones to our laptops and smart cars. Demand for copper will only increase as we become more technologically advanced.

The mine has been approved by the federal government. It is time for us to move forward with the permitting process. Further delay will be counterproductive to the goals of those who oppose this mine. When the land exchange takes effect next month, it could potentially create more opportunity for this mine to open without the proper permitting, environmental and socio-economic mitigations that are needed to ensure that the project is a net positive for Superior and the State of Arizona. This would be a travesty.

A wise person once told me: if you are not at the table, then they will eat your lunch. It is time for the opposition groups to come to the table and help develop solutions. This ore body will be mined, and it must be mined with the proper protections in place. We have been fighting for these protections since this legislation became law in 2014. Let's not let them eat our lunch.

*Mila Besich is the Mayor of Superior, Arizona and serves as the Executive Director for the Copper Corridor Economic Development Coalition*