

September 11, 2020

To the Arizona Tribal Leaders Affected by the Proposed Resolution Copper Mine:

I am responding due to a letter by Neil Bosworth, Forest Supervisor, Tonto National Forest (dated August 28, 2020, File Code: 1560) to the White Mountain Apache Chairwoman, Gwendena Lee-Gatewood regarding the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange with Oak Flat to Resolution Copper.

First, I represent myself here as an Apache elder. I am almost 80 years old and have spent most of my life and career working to maintain, and pass down to our younger generations, our greatest birthright —our Apache language and cultural knowledge. Second, I am a White Mountain Apache Tribal official. I serve as the Tribe's Cultural Resource Director/NAGPRA Representative, Chair of the Cultural Advisory Board, and on other local Boards.

I am opposed to the proposed Resolution Copper Mine. I think it is time for our Pima, Tohono O'odham, Yavapai, and Apache Nations, our great leaders, and our esteemed cultural representatives to suspend all involvement in making plans for the proposed Resolution Copper Mine that will result in the destruction and desecration of Chich'il Bil Dagot'eel, our holy site.

We have had supposed "consultations" and submitted many statements describing the sacredness and cultural areas and our opposition to the plans by the Resolution Copper Mine corporation. The majority owner is Rio Tinto, the Australian company responsible, just four months ago, for obliterating the sacred Juukan Gorge rock shelters in Western Australia without properly notifying the Aboriginal traditional owners. Rio Tinto is working hard to do the same thing here. Their plan is to damage 35,000 acres (more than 50 square miles) of our beautiful ancestral lands and to make a toxic soup out of billions of gallons of precious clean water. Our homelands will never be the same....

These "consultations" are wrongheaded. In the old days, if somebody killed one of our relatives, if retaliation in-kind was not swift, then they did the next honorable thing: the relatives of the murderer came to the victim's family to provide a just and fair compensation for the loss. They provided the loved one's family with food, horses, and other goods. Amends were made and life went on.

Nobody would ever think about having a discussion with murderers before their foul and evil deed. But I see in that August 28, 2020 letter that Resolution Copper wants to close the deal to get the Tribes to participate in receiving funds for "Tribal Monitors" and "Cultural Programs." This is Resolution Copper's way to try to get tribes' help to legitimize and legalize killing our land and impeding our religious and cultural beliefs and spiritual traditions. Why would we ever agree to this?


I know we all need funding to support language and culture programs, of course, but let's not take this blood money now. Let's stand together and fight these foreign corporate invaders! Let's support the San Carlos Apache Tribe to stop the Resolution Copper Mine and protect our sacred ancestral land as our ancestors did for centuries.

Tonto National Forest and Resolution Copper officials think they have the laws on their side, but those laws all passed without knowledge, consultation, or support from Native People. AZ congressional members underhandedly submitted the attachment to a bill without our knowledge years ago. The land they want to destroy—the waters they want to poison and dry up, the plants and animals they want to kill, the sacred and holy resting places they want to desecrate—are Indigenous land. It is up to Tribal People to defend and protect it.

It is wrong for our People to be involved in planning to destroy sacred land that made us who we are. I am asking for all Native People to stop working with, and helping Tonto National Forest and Resolution Copper officials get approval for their mine.

Let's resist the divide-and-conquer strategy that made it even possible for this terrible idea for mining one of our most sacred places to have made it this far. Please join me and **just say NO to the proposed Resolution Copper Mine.**

Respectfully,


Ramon Riley, Cultural Resource Director/
NAGPRA Representative
Nohwike' Bagowah Culture Center
White Mountain Apache Tribe