



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 25, 2025

Contact: Ryan Colby

E-mail: media@becketfund.org

Phone: 202-349-7219

Apache Stronghold makes emergency appeal to save Oak Flat

Apaches ask lower court to stop government's imminent transfer of sacred site

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WASHINGTON – A coalition of Western Apaches, other Native peoples, and non-Native allies [asked](#) a federal court late yesterday to stop the U.S. government from handing over their sacred site at Oak Flat to a multinational mining giant as early as June 16, 2025. In [Apache Stronghold v. United States](#), the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals last year refused to stop the federal government from transferring Oak Flat to Resolution Copper, a Chinese-owned mining company that plans to turn the site into a massive mining crater, ending Apache religious practices forever ([Watch this short video to learn more](#)). The emergency appeal comes after the government [announced](#) last week it will forge ahead with the transfer even though the case is currently under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Since time immemorial, Western Apaches and other Native peoples have gathered at Oak Flat, outside of present-day Superior, Arizona, for sacred religious ceremonies that cannot take place anywhere else. Known in Apache as *Chi'chil Bildagoteel*, Oak Flat is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has been protected from mining and other harmful practices for decades. These protections were targeted in December 2014 when a last-minute provision was slipped into a must-pass defense bill authorizing the transfer of Oak Flat to the Resolution Copper company. Resolution Copper now plans to turn the sacred site into a two-mile-wide and 1,100-foot-deep crater. The majority owner of Resolution Copper, Rio Tinto, sparked international outrage when it [deliberately destroyed](#) 46,000-year-old Indigenous rock shelters at one of Australia's most significant cultural sites.

"The feds are barreling ahead to give Oak Flat to Resolution Copper, even as the Supreme Court considers whether to hear the case," **said Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at Becket.** "We're asking the courts to stop this move in its tracks and ensure justice can be delivered before Oak Flat is permanently destroyed."

Apache Stronghold filed this lawsuit in January 2021 seeking to halt the proposed mine at Oak Flat. The mine is opposed by 21 of 22 federally recognized tribal nations in Arizona, by the National Congress of American Indians, and by a [diverse coalition](#) of religious denominations, civil-rights organizations, and legal experts. Meanwhile, national polling indicates that [74% of Americans](#) support protecting Oak Flat. The Ninth Circuit [ruled 6-5](#) last year that the land transfer is not subject to federal laws protecting religious freedom. But five judges dissented, writing that the court "tragically err[ed]" by refusing to protect Oak Flat.

"Oak Flat is our spiritual lifeblood—the sacred place where generations of Apache have connected with our Creator," **said Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. of Apache Stronghold.** "We are asking the courts to protect Oak Flat just as they have protected the sacred places of other faiths across the country."

In addition to Becket, Apache Stronghold is represented by Erin Murphy of Clement & Murphy PLLC, Professor Stephanie Barclay of Georgetown Law School, and attorneys Michael V. Nixon and Clifford Levenson.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact Ryan Colby at media@becketfund.org or 202-349-7219.



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Additional Information:

- [Becket's emergency motion for injunction pending appeal in *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(April 24, 2025\)](#)
- [U.S. Government's sixty-day notice of publication of Final Environmental Impact Statement in *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(April 17, 2025\)](#)
- [Becket's Supreme Court reply brief in *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(November 6, 2024\)](#)
- [Becket's Supreme Court petition for certiorari in *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(September 11, 2024\)](#)
- [Video: *Sacred Lands and Copper Ore: Apaches Fight for their Ancestral Lands*](#)
- [Case page for *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(Images, b-roll and legal documents\)](#)
- [Media kit for *Apache Stronghold v. United States* \(Images for media use; credit Becket\)](#)

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*Becket is a non-profit, public-interest law firm dedicated to protecting the free expression of all religious traditions and has a 100% win-rate before the United States Supreme Court. For 30 years, it has successfully defended clients of all faiths, including **Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Native Americans, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians** (read more [here](#)).*