



News Release, August 30, 2024

On July 11th, 2024, the Apache Stronghold started the journey of prayer to the Supreme Court to stop the shattering of human existence and to protect Mother Earth. We have traveled, held ceremonies and gathered prayers from Tribes, Communities, Churches, and people in support of saving Oak Flat and religious freedom and protections for all. We began in the Northwest, Westcoast, South, mid-west to the East to gather in Washington DC at the Supreme court on September 11.

We are appealing a lower court ruling that would have allowed the total destruction of Oak Flat by allowing the land to be transferred to Resolution Copper, a foreign owned company, owned by BHP and Rio Tinto.

We will appeal *Apache Stronghold v. United States* to the U.S. Supreme Court on September 11. The case involves the federal government's planned destruction of Oak Flat—known in Apache as Chi'chil Bildagoteel—a sacred site where Western Apaches and other Native peoples have worshipped since time immemorial. Oak Flat is the birthplace of our religion and the site of sacred ceremonies that cannot take place anywhere else.

The United States is now planning to transfer ownership of Oak Flat to Resolution Copper, a foreign-owned mining company that plans to destroy it. Resolution's mine will swallow Oak Flat in a two-mile-wide, 1,100-foot-deep crater, ending Apache religious practices forever.

Our lawsuit challenges the destruction of Oak Flat as a violation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), the Constitution, and the 1852 Treaty with the Western Apaches. In March, the sharply divided Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, by a 6-5 vote, ruled that the obliteration of Oak Flat does not amount to a “substantial burden” on our religious exercise and that the Constitution and federal civil rights laws do not apply to the government's disposition of “its own land.”

In September, we will ask the Supreme Court to correct this ruling and hold that federal law protects Oak Flat. The stakes could not be any higher. If the Ninth Circuit's ruling is allowed to stand, the United States will be allowed to destroy Oak

Flat and any other sacred site with impunity. If the Supreme Court rules in our favor, it will ensure that Native Americans receive the same protection for our religious freedom that all other religious groups across the country already enjoy. A decision in the case is expected in 2025.

Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. explained, “what saddens me, what I have witnessed going through reservations, towns, sitting with and discussing with many people across this country, is seeing that when it comes to the environment, it’s not being protected. When we talked about water or land, it not only affects Oak Flats but many places have been affected by Acts of Congress, the cities are no different. The United States does not protect the environment by bypassing the laws that they enacted, I have seen devastation across this country, the government pursuing unproven endeavors overlooking it’s peoples essential liberties. We need to come together on this court case, our spirituality and the survival of the earth are at stake, the suffering of the people is what we are bringing to the Supreme court.

This is an invitation to participate in the Apache Stronghold’s Day of Prayer on September 11, 2024, at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.



Dr. Nosie states to crowd gathered,"As we continue our journey, heading east after hitting every stop in the West, we're bringing the spirit of the West with us. Let it be known-the spirits are coming." Apache Stronghold at the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation, Berkeley, CA. August 8, 2024. Photo by Molly Peters