



Mine shafts 10, left, and 9, right, tower over the Resolution Copper Mining Company facility, June 9, 2023, in Miami, Ariz. (AP/Matt York, File)

Susan Montoya Bryan

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

OAK FLAT, Arizona — March 19, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The transfer of federal forest land in Arizona to a pair of international companies that plan to mine one of the largest copper deposits in North America is complete, but a group of Apache women is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene as a last-ditch effort to stop the project.

The title to the land was conveyed by the federal government to Resolution Copper on Friday after an appeals court denied requests by the San Carlos Apache Tribe and environmentalists seeking to block the move.

The appeals court determined that the plaintiffs' legal claims likely would not succeed and lifted an [emergency injunction](#) that was put in place last summer.

The land includes Oak Flat — an area used for centuries for [religious ceremonies, prayer and gathering of medicinal plants](#) by the San Carlos Apache people and other Native American tribes. The tribe, the activist group Apache Stronghold and other plaintiffs have been [fighting for years](#) to save what tribal members call Chi'chil Bildagoteel.

The appeals court in Friday's ruling recognized that the land transfer will fundamentally alter the nature of the land and lead to the destruction of sites sacred to the tribe and other plaintiffs.

"Despite those grave harms to Native religious practice, Congress has chosen to transfer this land, and plaintiffs have not raised any viable challenges to that decision," the court stated.

Attorneys for the U.S. Forest Service have argued in court filings over the years that the agency has no discretion because the exchange was indeed mandated by Congress when language was included in a must-pass national defense spending bill that was signed into law in 2014 by then-President Barack Obama.

Advertisement

In a statement issued Monday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins — who oversees the Forest Service — said the project is among those that will help fulfill President Donald Trump's vision of energy independence.

"Completing this land exchange unlocks a major domestic source of copper, essential for defense, grid modernization and next-generation energy, and positions the nation to secure its future by expanding mineral production and unleashing America's full resource potential," she said.

Resolution Copper — a subsidiary of international mining giants Rio Tinto and BHP — estimates the mine will generate \$1 billion a year for Arizona's economy and create thousands of jobs. The project has support in the [nearby community of Superior](#).

Resolution Copper has said the project underwent an extensive review by the Forest Service that has included consultation with tribes that have ancestral ties to the land.

"Courts at every level have consistently ruled in favor of Resolution Copper, and three different presidential administrations have supported this project," Vicky Peacey, Resolution's president and general manager, said in a statement. "It is time for the meritless litigation to end."

The company did not immediately answer questions about the timetable for work at the site.

In a statement shared on social media, Wendsler Nosie Sr. of the group Apache Stronghold continued to raise concerns about water use and the potential for contamination as mining gets underway.

"The fight for Oak Flat raises critical issues about the environment and our nation's commitment to Native rights and religious freedom," Nosie said. "But at its heart, it is a battle for our sacred and holy land, the faith that has always been defined by it, and the right to have our religious traditions respected and protected."