

Oak Flat Fact Sheet

Oak Flat is located 4 miles east of Superior, AZ, and an hour east of Phoenix off HWY 60. Queen Creek Canyon is on the northern edge, Apache Leap on the west, and Ga'an Canyon (Devil's Canyon) is on the east and south.

Oak Flat contains medicinal plants, food sources, and healing waters and has been continually used for prayer and ceremony by the Apache people. This sacred watershed is an ecological and recreational haven under attack by foreign mining companies who have hijacked the normal public land mine permitting and NEPA process.

We need your help to protect Oak Flat.

Sacred Place at Risk

- Apache warriors leapt to their death rather than be captured by the US Calvary at Apache Leap. The entire area, as described above, is sacred to Western Apache and other Tribes.
- Oak Flat was home to Western Apache and other Tribes before removal to the San Carlos Apache and other reservations in 1871.
- "This is the best set of Apache archaeological sites ever documented, period, full stop," says John Welch, a former historic preservation officer for the White Mountain Apache Tribe and a professor at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada.
- A fully functional and intact ecosystem is necessary for religious freedom at Oak Flat. Religious freedom is necessary for a fully functioning ecosystem.
- Oak Flat and Ga'an Canyon are "where the spiritual beings that represent healing live," Vernelda Grant, tribal historic preservation officer for the San Carlos Apache Tribe says. "We have songs and ceremonies that are sung there – it's a place to just pray and pray for healing."

Land Swap Takes Sacred Lands

- In late 2014, Senators McCain and Flake, along with Representatives Gosar and Kirkpatrick, gave Oak Flat, sacred land, to Rio Tinto mining company when they buried the Oak Flat land exchange deep in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which was signed into law by President Obama.
- The NDAA short-circuits required government-to-government consultation process between the federal government and effected Tribes and short-circuits normal permitting processes for mines on public lands.
- The Act is the first and only Act of Congress that gives a Native American sacred site to a foreign corporation.
- Rio Tinto mining company has planned 7,000 foot deep automated underground mine with a surface crater 1,000 feet deep and 2 miles wide.
- The waste dump would cover 7,000 acres with a pile of toxic tailings more than 500 feet tall.
- Rio Tinto plans to ship unprocessed copper overseas from the port of Guaymas in Mexico. The copper would most likely be refined in China.
-

Wildlife at Risk

- The federally endangered Arizona hedgehog cactus can be found at Oak Flat. An endangered Sonoran ocelot was killed within three miles of Oak Flat.
- Four bird species found at Oak Flat are on the National Audubon Society's watch list: black-chinned sparrow, Costa's hummingbird, Lewis's woodpecker, and gray vireo.
- Black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, coatimundi, javalina, ring-tailed cat, all four native Arizona species of skunk, and many more animals live at Oak Flat.

Water at Risk

- Oak Flat is a rare desert riparian habitat (less than 5% remains in Arizona) with springs and ponds that flow year-round.
Rio Tinto's mine plan would dewater all of Oak Flat, possibly using as much water on an annual basis as the city of Tempe - 40,000 acre feet per year.
- Rio Tinto's mine dewatering near Oak Flat has lowered the water table in Queen Creek significantly, requiring the construction of a new water well for the town of Queen Valley.
- Rio Tinto's proposed waste pile between Superior and Queen Valley drains into Queen Creek and could significantly impact water quality in Queen Creek, which is already impaired.

Recreation at Risk

- Oak Flat Campground is federal public land in the Tonto National Forest.
- Many of the Campground facilities were constructed during the depression by the CCC and WPA projects.
- The area was protected from mining by President Eisenhower in 1955
- This is one of the best rock climbing and bouldering areas in North America with over 2,500 published climbing "problems" and perhaps an equal number of undiscovered or unnamed climbs.
- Oak Flat is used by bird watchers, hikers, off-road vehicle enthusiasts and many others for recreation.
- Campers from around the world come to Oak Flat for the rustic and free campground facilities.
- Boy Scouts, church groups, families and many others from Superior and surrounding small mining towns frequent Oak Flat.

What you can do

- Get involved with one of the many organizations working to protect Oak Flat: Arizona Mining Reform Coalition, Concerned Citizens and Retired Miners Coalition, Spirit of the Mountain Runners, Apache Stronghold, Access Fund, Concerned Climbers of Arizona, Sierra Club, Tucson Audubon Society, Center for Biological Diversity, and many others.
- Sign up for our action alert list at www.AZminingreform.org
- Write letters to the editor
- Educate yourself, your friends, neighbors, and colleagues.
- Go to Oak Flat!
- Volunteer

January 30, 2015