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Item 8

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SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBE

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Wendsler Nosie Sr.
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Joint Oak Flat/Apache Leap Statement

The purpose of this statement is to affirm why the Lipan Apache Woman's Defense, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Society for Threatened Peoples, The Hawaiian Kingdom, Chihene Nde Warm Springs Band of Chiricahua Apache, Kaoni Foundation, and The Lipan Apache Band of Texas opposes the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and the proposed Resolution Copper mine at Chich'il Bildagoteel, how these proposed activities will seriously harm Apaches, and what steps the Tribe believes should be taken to resolve this matter.

Apaches have traditionally opposed large-scale mining to this day. Since 1996 the Tribe's Elder's Cultural Advisory Council has written several formal letters to Federal and local government agencies strongly opposing large-scale mining. Long before that countless Apaches fought, killed, and died protecting our homelands from large-scale mining.

Mining is inconsistent with our conservative, traditional Apache values. We have been taught to respect the natural world, and to keep it clean and natural. Our traditional relationship with the land is deep and personal. We depend on the natural world for our survival, and our survival depends on maintaining our personal relationships with all living things. Our word for this earth is Nigosdzan, "Earth is Woman". We were taught never to desecrate her by digging deep into her veins.

In pre-Reservation days rape was punishable by death, the victim's relatives exacting justice from the perpetrator. When our ancestors saw disrespectful miners raping Nigosdzan, they responded harshly in a proper, traditional manner. They viewed many of the early White settlers, especially miners, as filthy savages who destroyed the natural world wherever they went through mining, overgrazing, over-hunting, or by dirtying the land with their garbage and indiscriminate human waste. Our ancestors found these activities shocking and dangerous.

Everything in the natural world is alive and has a power. We have a name for everything: the plants, the animals, the birds, the atmosphere, the minerals, the winds, the stars, the bodies of waters, the places, and everything else. We recognize the power that each element of the natural world has, and that each individual power is directly related to particular Holy Beings.

We recognize that each of these elements works in concert with the other elements that make up an ecosystem. The power of each of these species is influenced by the other species in the ecosystem, and these combinations of power contribute to the power of the entire ecosystem. All of these powers are in turn influenced by the particular power of the place they are found, so that the power of each ecosystem cannot be duplicated or replaced.

Apaches often need to access these particular species and ecosystems, in person or remotely, by physical access, prayer, song, vision, or ceremony. Our traditional specialists use song cycles and ceremonies - just like modern scientists use formulas and technology - for the community's healing, protection, and physical and spiritual well-being and happiness.

Damage to these ecosystems and to the species found within them, weakens their power and shows great disrespect to the Holy Beings with whom they are associated, who have the ability to deny the benefits of this power, or the spiritual or physical access to these ecosystems. Losing access to these ecosystems – both by their closure or their destruction – profoundly weakens the strength of Apache prayer and ceremony, and severely limits the ability of Apaches to effectively practice their religion, ultimately resulting in physical and spiritual harm to Apaches.

Over the past 150 years our traditional Apache lands have been destroyed, place-by-place, ecosystem-by-ecosystem. We see parking lots covering our traditional food and medicine gathering areas, our sacred springs run dry by development, and trailer parks in our traditional corn and pumpkin fields. Now you are proposing more destruction.

The proposed mine at Chich'il Bildagoteel will destroy many particular ecosystems and the living things within them. These ecosystems and living things are associated with particular Holy Beings that we depend on, in particular a certain kind of Gaan – all-powerful Mountain Spirits – with whom Chich'il Bildagoteel is associated. Destroying this area will greatly hurt our ability to conduct public and private ceremonies involving these Gaan and other Holy Beings.

The area impacted by the mine includes cherished traditional food and medicine gathering areas, which would be forever lost if the mine were to open. We believe that the proposed mine will seriously affect the waters both above and below the ground that we depend on for physical and spiritual sustenance. **We believe that there is no way to mitigate this loss or the serious impacts to Apaches.** We believe that destroying these ecosystems will violate our civil and religious rights.

We, like you, believe in economic development for our people. We need jobs desperately. But we can't accept an economy that is inconsistent with our most deeply held values. Just as you don't want jobs for your young people that are based on drugs or prostitution, we don't want jobs that are based on destroying Nigodzan. We believe that an economy based on extractive industries is short-term, and physically and spiritually harmful. We believe, like so many international reports indicate, that extractive industries rarely benefit indigenous communities.

We want the Federal Government to proceed with a full administrative review through an Environmental Impact Statement so that we can more fully analyze the serious impacts that this proposed mine will have on our people. Existing cultural resource legislation has been ignored by the absence of meaningful, government-to-government consultation and the absence of responsible efforts to manage lands important to Indigenous populations, not to mention the public-at-large. At that time, we will be happy to discuss in detail these impacts, and the ways in which they may or may not be mitigated.

We would also like to work with our local, state, and Federal governments in identifying long-term, responsible economic development strategies for all of us that are consistent with both traditional Apache values and scientifically-informed, environmentally sustainable practices.

Thank you for your attention to projects occurring on our traditional Apache lands, ancestral lands to many Indigenous populations and the many diverse publics who use and care for the Oak Flat/Apache Leap areas. If you would like more information, please contact Chairman Wendsler Nosie Sr. at (928) 475-2361, ext. 225.