

# APACHE STRONGHOLD

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Above:* Members of the Apache Stronghold, San Carlos Apache leaders, and National and Regional tribal organization leaders meet with U.S. Presidential Candidate Senator Bernie Sanders to discuss the urgent need to Save Oak Flat.

## **Senators Bernie Sanders Introduces Senate Companion Bill to Repeal Southeast Arizona Land Exchange**

Today, Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT), with original co-sponsor Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and others, introduced the Senate companion of the Save Oak Flat Act. The bill would repeal Section 3003 of the FY15 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which approved the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange (“the Land Exchange”).

Hundreds of tribal governments, tribal organizations, and a growing group of hundreds of thousands of individual grassroots activists have united in opposition to the Land Exchange before Congress for more than a decade. Because of this opposition, House of Representatives Leadership twice pulled the bill from consideration because it lacked the votes for passage during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Senate also refused to move the bill forward.

To circumvent and silence this opposition, Arizona Senator John McCain and Representatives Paul Gosar and Ann Kirkpatrick forced a closed-door deal to attach the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange as a midnight rider into the NDAA.

The Land Exchange authorizes the transfer of Oak Flat and nearby lands in the Tonto National Forest to Resolution Copper Mining, which is owned by the foreign mining giants Rio Tinto PLC (United

Kingdom) and BHP Billiton Ltd (Australia) for certain destruction. These U.S. Forest Service lands are holy grounds to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other tribes in the region.

Wendsler Nosie, Sr., San Carlos Apache Tribe Councilman and Member of the Apache Stronghold, applauded the introduction of the Senate companion bill to repeal the Land Exchange. “The Senate introduction is welcome news to residents of Arizona, Indian country, the United States, and the world. The bill shines light on the deceit used to enact the Land Exchange. As true leaders of this Country, the people have invested their hopes, dreams, and spirit into honest and transparent decision making for the good of all people. We must not fear to undo a wrong to make it right. For when it comes to the future of our children, this shouldn’t be difficult to do.”

Nosie added, “So many people from all across the country – not just tribal groups, but faith communities, environmental groups. A mother and daughter walked from Washington State to Oak Flat, pastors from North Carolina, to the residents of D.C. who participated in our rally after reading information on social media – all of these people have helped us reach this day.”

Naelyn Pike, tribal youth representative member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the Apache Stronghold, also lauded the Senate introduction. “Seeing Senator Sanders in Tucson – and the fact that he wanted the youth to speak to the people was inspiring for many Native youth. For so long Native people have been put in the dark and silenced. The fact that a U.S. Senator and Presidential Candidate has chosen to focus on protecting Oak Flat give hope for my people and my generation, and more importantly for the next generation. Despite all the bad that has happened, good can come out of this by uniting to protect our culture and way of life. Hopefully this encourages more Members of Congress and individuals nationwide to fight and engage on this issue. It brings me hope not just for native people and native youth, but for the future of our Country.”

Resolution Copper has chosen to mine the copper using the highly destructive block cave mining technique. By Resolution Copper’s own admission, this will result in collapsing the surface of the land, destroying forever our place of worship.

The Tribe and nearby communities are also concerned with possible damage to the region’s water quality and water supply. Copper is one of the most water-intensive forms of mining. The block cave mining technique further intensifies the need for water. The United States established the Tonto National Forest in 1904 to protect the region’s watershed. These protections would fall once the land is transferred into private ownership pursuant to the Land Exchange.

In June, Rep. Raul Grijalva introduced the House companion bill, H.R. 2811, which has been referred to the House Natural Resources Committee. Thirty-six (36) bipartisan co-sponsors have signed on to support the House bill.

Senator Sanders’ introduction today follows a House Natural Resources Committee forum on the urgent need to protect Native American holy sites—with a specific focus on the need to Save Oak Flat. Councilman Wendsler Nosie acknowledged the thoughts and prayers for this movement, “Wednesday there was a day of prayer taken place throughout Indian Country and around the world. To all those who participated, we say thank you.”

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