

# SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBE

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## *For Immediate Release*

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## Chi'chil Bildagoteel (Oak Flat) Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

By Valerie O. Key

**San Carlos, AZ** – On Friday, March 4, the U.S. National Park Service listed the Chi'Chil Bildagoteel Historic District Traditional Cultural Property (Oak Flat) located in the Tonto National Forest on the National Register of Historic Places. The San Carlos Apache Tribe applauds this important determination by the Park Service, and appreciates the Obama Administration's recognition that tribal sacred areas deserve the utmost protection and preservation.

We also applaud the many Members of Congress who have stood with us and co-sponsored H.R. 2811 and S. 2242, the Save Oak Flat Act. This Act would **repeal** Section 3003, the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange Act (Land Exchange), of the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would give Chi'Chil Bildagoteel to foreign-owned mining conglomerates, resulting in the destruction of this sacred area. The mining companies seek to develop the largest copper mine in North America on this sacred land that will result in the collapse of an area at least 2 miles in diameter. The Save Oak Flat Act would immediately halt this giveaway of land and natural resources owned by the American people.

We are disappointed that Congressman Gosar (AZ-04), a Representative whose district does not include Chi'Chil Bildagoteel, has taken such a vehement stance against protecting a tribal sacred area in support of foreign mining interests. Apaches and other Native Americans have lived or

Page 2 of 2 gone to Chi'Chil Bildagoteel since our Creator put us here. The Congressman knows nothing about us and has no standing to make pronouncements about our connections to this area. As these foreign companies seek to profit from a purported \$64 billion worth of copper from underneath Chi'Chil Bildagoteel, we are not surprised by Congressman Gosar's actions.

A national coalition of tribes, tribal groups, environmental, outdoor recreation, and religious organizations worked to educate Congress and defeat passage of the Land Exchange. The Land Exchange rider was included in NDAA due to backroom deals that subverted the will of the majority of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate who opposed the Land Exchange. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell called the passage of the Land Exchange "profoundly disappointing."

Despite the passage of the Land Exchange, we and our allies have continued the fight to protect this sacred area. Rep. Gosar's zeal for the destruction of Chi'Chil Bildagoteel shows that the Wyoming-born Congressman cares little about our concerns, the potential contamination of the local aquifer, and the concerns raised by others in the region. Rep. Gosar's close ties to the mining industry and their significant monetary support for his campaign coffers have resulted in yet another example of big business taking priority over Native people.

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