

Native American Group Pushes to Overturn US Court Decision on Rio's Arizona Copper Mine



A Native American group is urging a U.S. appeals court to overturn a previous ruling that granted land to Rio Tinto for a copper mine project in Arizona, arguing that the land holds sacred and cultural significance.

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Background of the Ruling

Earlier this month, a segment of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of allowing the federal government to allocate thousands of acres in Arizona to Rio Tinto and its minority partner, BHP, for the Resolution Copper project.

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Opposition from Apache Stronghold

Apache Stronghold, a nonprofit organization representing the San Carlos Apache tribe and others, has vehemently opposed the mine's development. They argue that the proposed mine site holds historical importance, serving as a location for Indigenous ceremonies for generations. If the project proceeds, it would result in the destruction of this sacred site, with a crater measuring 2 miles wide and 1,000 feet deep.

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Legal Challenge

The Native American group, represented by attorney Luke Goodrich from Becket Law, is seeking a full-court review of the ruling, emphasizing the significance of the case.

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Industry Response

Rio Tinto acknowledged the action taken by Apache Stronghold but awaits further direction from the court. On the other hand, BHP has not provided any comments on the matter.

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Context and Implications

The court's decision to approve the land swap reflects a previous decision made in 2014 by the U.S. Congress and former President Barack Obama. However, the move has sparked controversy, particularly during the U.S. presidential election season. Former President Donald Trump has expressed support for the mine, while President Joe Biden narrowly won Arizona in 2020, partly due to Native American votes.

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Conclusion

The legal battle surrounding the Rio Tinto copper mine project underscores the ongoing tensions between economic development and Indigenous rights, raising broader questions about environmental protection and cultural preservation.

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