



SAVE THE SCENIC SANTA RITAS ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Groups Call on Forest Service to Re-Assert Control Over Rosemont Public Involvement Process

(TUCSON, Ariz. - 11/1/11) In a letter sent today to Coronado National Forest Supervisor Jim Upchurch, 11 environmental groups called on the U.S. Forest Service to “take immediate and decisive steps” to restore public confidence in the public comment process for the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed massive open-pit copper mine in the Santa Rita Mountains near Tucson, AZ.

In the letter, these groups reiterated Congressman Raúl Grijalva’s demand that the Forest Service “suspend the public comment process until it can be implemented without Augusta/Rosemont’s involvement.”

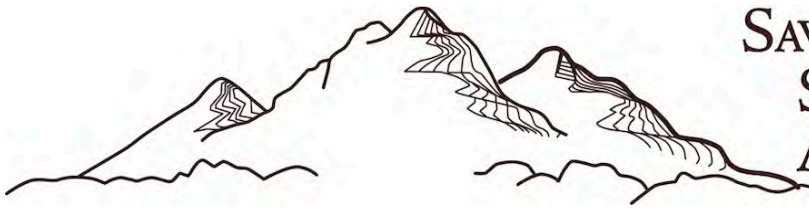
Today’s letter follows disclosures that the PR firm for Augusta Resource and its subsidiary Rosemont Copper was directly involved in the “planning and organizing” of DEIS public meetings.

This recent development combined with Augusta/Rosemont’s previous participation in closed-door Forest Service meetings that were labeled an “appearance of impropriety” by a federal judge, “casts doubt on the objectivity of the agency in its relationship with Rosemont Copper” according to the letter.

Save the Scenic Santa Ritas (SSSR) is a non-profit organization committed to protecting the Santa Rita and Patagonia Mountains in southern Arizona from environmental degradation resulting from mining activities.

[Editors Note: A copy of the letter is attached.]

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November 1, 2011

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Mr. Jim Upchurch, Forest Supervisor
Coronado National Forest
United States Forest Service
300 W. Congress Street
Tucson, AZ 85701

Dear Supervisor Upchurch:

Advisory Board

Bob Barnhill
Jovana Brown
Phil Caputo
Anne Gibson
Lynn Harris
Bob Sharp
Steve Strom
Carol Tahse
Tom Volgy

We are less than 2 weeks away from the first public meeting on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed Rosemont Copper mine in the Santa Rita Mountains near Tucson. Thus, we are writing to you to see what steps the Forest Service has taken to modify the public involvement process to remove the inappropriate influence of Augusta Resource and its subsidiary Rosemont Copper.

Last week, as you may know, U.S. Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack raising concerns about the role of Augusta/Rosemont's PR firm in the planning and organizing of the Rosemont DEIS public meetings. In this letter, Congressman Grijalva recommended that the Forest Service suspend the 90-day public comment period for the Rosemont DEIS until a "new public information process without Rosemont's involvement" can be developed.

Congressman Grijalva's letter comes after Tohono O'odham Nation Chairman Ned Norris brought these concerns to your attention. To date, your only public response to this issue has been to cancel the two public meeting scheduled at the Nation's casino.

As you know, the Forest Service and Rosemont/Augusta have previously engaged in behavior that casts doubt on the objectivity of the agency in its relationship with Rosemont Copper. As Congressman Grijalva and Chairman Norris noted in their respective letters, a U.S. District Court Judge stated that Augusta/Rosemont's participation in a series of closed-door Forest Service meetings on DEIS-related issues presented an "appearance of impropriety".

The recent disclosures that Augusta/Rosemont's PR firm has taken a leading role in organizing and planning the Forest Service's public involvement process further compromises the public's confidence that your agency will put its interests ahead of Rosemont's investors. As Congressman Grijalva said in his letter to Secretary Vilsack, "[t]he public's trust that the Forest Service will conduct a transparent and meaningful public involvement process is certainly compromised when it appears that Rosemont and its agents are allowed to rig this process."

To restore that public confidence, it is imperative that the Forest Service take immediate and decisive steps such as those Congressman Grijalva suggested and suspend the public comment process until it can be implemented without Augusta/Rosemont's involvement.

As the Forest, itself, develops a new schedule of public hearings, scheduling some meetings in the early evening and locating some of them in the places where the concern is greatest, it would help to re-establish the public's belief that you, not Rosemont or Augusta, are in control of the process and making a good faith effort to appropriately engage the interested public. The places of greatest concern are: Green Valley, Sahuarita, Corona de Tucson, Vail, Sonoita, Patagonia, as well as central Tucson. We expect to see at least some meetings scheduled in each of these communities.

We, and the public, look forward to hearing from you. Your continued silence on this matter lends more evidence to the notion that the Forest Service's objectivity is compromised as it relates to Rosemont Copper.

Sincerely,



Gayle Hartmann, President
Save the Scenic Santa Ritas



Sandy Bahr, Chapter Director
Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter



Lauren Pagel, Policy Director
Earthworks




Randy Serraglio, Southwest Conservation Advocate
Center for Biological Diversity



Eva Sargent, Director, Southwest Programs
Defenders of Wildlife Southwest Office



Dr. Paul Green, Executive Director
Tucson Audubon



Melanie Emerson, Executive Director
Sky Island Alliance



Carolyn Campbell, Executive Director
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection



Roger Featherstone, Director
Arizona Mining Reform Coalition



Charlotte Cook, Treasurer
Empire Fagan Coalition



Michael Stabile, Treasurer
Patagonia Area Resource Alliance

c.c. The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
The Honorable Gabrielle Giffords
Chairman Ned Norris Jr.
Pima County Board of Supervisors