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Forest Service May Approve Rosemont Mine Prematurely

But Mine Cannot Move Forward With Other Permits Still Outstanding

TUCSON, Ariz.— The U.S. Forest Service today published a notice in the federal register indicating it will issue a decision on the proposed Rosemont open-pit copper mine in early June.

The Coronado National Forest, where the mine would be located, gave preliminary approval to the controversial project three years ago. A final decision was withheld pending other outstanding permitting reviews, including a Clean Water Act permit that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has recommended for denial.

The Rosemont project would blast a mile-wide, 3,000-foot deep pit in the Santa Rita Mountains of southern Arizona and bury thousands of acres of public land in more than a billion tons of toxic waste.

“No rational analysis could lead the stewards of our public lands to conclude that this devastating project is acceptable,” said Randy Serraglio, conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity. “This decision is motivated by politics and corruption. It’s a hollow paperwork maneuver that will certainly be challenged.”

The mine’s footprint lies squarely in jaguar critical habitat, land that’s been scientifically determined to be critically important for the survival and recovery of jaguars in the United States. In fact the mine would destroy much of the home territory of the famous jaguar El Jefe, who was photographed more than 100 times living in the Santa Ritas over a period of three years.

“Forest Service officials have said repeatedly that they would approve the Rosemont Mine only if it complied with all other applicable laws,” Serraglio said. “Apparently, with the Trump administration, laws no longer have meaning and promises are meant to be broken. The American people, our public lands and wildlife deserve better.”

More than a dozen imperiled species could be harmed by the mine, including ocelot that have been photographed immediately adjacent to the mine site and endangered fish and frogs living in nearby Cienega Creek. The creek could be dried up by the mine’s vast groundwater pumping.

The Cienega Creek watershed also provides up to 20 percent of the annual natural recharge in Tucson's groundwater basin, a vital resource that could be polluted and significantly diminished by the mine.

"There is no compelling reason for the Forest Service to move forward with this decision at this time," said Serraglio. "It's a slap in the face to other agencies that are still carefully considering the devastating impacts of this proposal. There are still far too many unanswered questions about Rosemont to plausibly pretend that a decision is warranted."

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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