



# SAVE THE SCENIC SANTA RITAS ASSOCIATION

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October 11, 2023

The Honorable Katie Hobbs, Governor  
State of Arizona  
1700 W. Washington St.  
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Governor Hobbs:

As president of the Tucson-based, nonprofit, conservation group Save the Scenic Santa Ritas, I ask your administration to immediately cease providing crucial support to Toronto-based Hudbay Minerals' plans to construct the Copper World/Rosemont Mine Complex in the Santa Rita Mountains southeast of Tucson.

Members of your staff, including your Chief of Staff, met with representatives of SSSR and other organizations opposed to the destruction of the Santa Rita Mountains by Hudbay on Sept. 26. While I was not in attendance, participants said it was a productive meeting. However, I would like to take a moment in this letter to reiterate some of the points conveyed at that meeting and share additional information.

Hudbay, which has put itself up [for sale](#) and will not decide before [2025](#) whether to build the mine, nevertheless is using the state of Arizona to increase the speculative value of the company. At Hudbay's request, the State Land Department is preparing to [auction](#) two parcels of State Trust Land that Hudbay is seeking to purchase to dump millions of tons of toxic mining waste (called tailings) and in early 2023, approved a Right-of-Way across the Santa Rita Experimental Range that allows Hudbay to avoid federal environmental laws.

We respectfully request that you withdraw the proposed auction of State Trust Land and rescind the ROW that we believe was approved in violation of the state Open Meeting Law.

Federal court decisions in [2019](#) and [2022](#) forced Hudbay to abandon its plan to develop the Rosemont Mine on the east side of the mountain, where it intended to dump mining waste on 2,500 acres of Coronado National Forest. Hudbay subsequently shifted its attention to the west side of the mountain immediately east of the [State Land Department's 50,000-acre [Santa Rita Experimental Range](#) managed by the University of Arizona. Hudbay rebranded the project "Copper World" and has since benefited immensely from the Department's willingness to ignore state public records and open meeting laws.

The Department has refused to produce public records to Save the Scenic Santa Ritas despite formal public records requests filed on [April 17, 2023](#) and [June 20, 2023](#). We also have substantial evidence that shows the Department [violated the Open Meeting Law](#) in December 2022 when the Board of Appeals approved a ROW across the SRER for two water pipelines only to see the Department subsequently change the purpose of the ROW -- without public notice -- to allow for six pipelines including those that transport toxic mine tailings.

Securing the ROW through the SRER allowed Hudbay to abandon a key part of its [May 2022 reclamation plan](#) submitted to the Office of the State Mine Inspector to construct underground tailings pipelines through federal land that separates its mine processing operations from the waste dumps. Going through U.S. Bureau of Land Management property would have required an environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act. Instead, Hudbay obtained the ROW through the SRER without any environmental review that would have determined the potential impact on State Trust Land if the tailings pipelines were to rupture.

We don't know if previous Department Director Lisa Atkins signed the ROW allowing for tailings pipelines prior to leaving office in mid-January or if it was signed by an interim or the current director because the Department refuses to release public records requesting this specific information dating back to April 17, 2023. The Department's lack of transparency and ignoring the Open Meeting Law is extremely disturbing and undermines your commitment to open and responsive government.

Hudbay intends to dump more than 400 million tons of toxic mining waste laced with lead and other metals adjacent to the SRER, which is required by [statute](#) (see page 208-209) to conduct "ecological and rangeland research". The SRER has operated for 121 years, making it one of the most important open-space research centers owned by a state agency in the United States. The SRER and the University of Arizona have remained silent on Hudbay's plans that threaten the rangeland's core function.

The mine waste dumps will also be less than a mile from an elementary school and will threaten the health of children. Arizona's weak environmental regulations will not protect the public from mine waste dumps that have a long history of [polluting the state's groundwater and surface water](#).

Hudbay also has a notorious history of serious human rights violations and a history of environmental contamination. The company [hired Peruvian National Police](#), who subsequently [beat and teargassed](#) villagers opposed to its Constancia Copper Mine. Hudbay's security chief at a Guatemalan nickel mine [pleaded guilty](#) to murdering an indigenous leader opposed to the mine. Hudbay's copper smelter in Flin Flon, Manitoba, poisoned the land and left [elevated levels of lead](#) in the blood of children. The company [sued](#) a First Nation tribe in Manitoba that opposed its mining operations.

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Hudbay is now misleading the public and your Administration by [falsely claiming](#) it will produce finished copper for U.S. markets. The company's [latest technical report](#) states it plans to export raw copper concentrate overseas for processing into useable metal for at least the first four years, if not over the entire 20 years of the mine plan.

As you know, the Santa Rita Mountain range is an integral segment of the [Sky Islands](#), the most biologically diverse region in North America, and includes sites of cultural significance for Native Americans. The City of Tucson, Pima County, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and the Hopi Tribe are among many entities that oppose this mining project.

These facts make it abundantly clear that your Administration is on the wrong side of this issue. We believe that it is the best interest of the State that you direct the State Land Department to withdraw the two State Trust Land parcels from auction and to rescind the tailings pipeline ROW through the Santa Rita Experimental Range that was approved in violation of the Open Meeting Law.

I'm available to meet with you at your earliest opportunity to discuss this vital issue to Southern Arizona.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'TN' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Thomas Nelson, Ph.D., President  
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c.c. Chad Campbell  
Maren Mahoney  
Will Greene