

Too Soon to Give Up the Fight at Oak Flat

Since last winter, the Access Fund has lobbied on behalf of climbers from Arizona and across the country to save public access at Oak Flat near Superior, Arizona. So far, our advocacy work has included (and will continue to include) extensive lobbying of US Senators Kyl and McCain, US Representative Renzi (in both Arizona and DC), Arizona Governor Napolitano, many local officials and candidates, the Tonto National Forest, Arizona BLM, Central Arizona Project, several state agencies concerned with land and water issues, and the organizer of the Phoenix Boulder Blast. In addition, we have met and will continue to meet with Resolution Copper Company (RCC). Perhaps most important, we helped establish the Friends of Queen Creek (FoQC) (<http://www.friendsofqueencreek.com>) who is now the leading voice defending Oak Flat access.

Despite all the rumors and uninformed declarations being circulated that there is no chance in saving Oak Flat, climbers need to keep fighting for recreational access, maintain a unified voice, and not be fooled by those that urge us to give up or cut a deal now to develop another climbing area in exchange for Oak Flat. It's far too soon to give up the fight at Oak Flat.

Regardless of what has been stated in the media, RCC does not currently have the right to mine beneath Oak Flat and in the process destroy the surface. Unlike many other areas subject to federal mining laws, an executive order signed in 1954 under President Eisenhower (and upheld in 1974 by Nixon) protects Oak Flat from mining and for recreation. RCC must either get the mining restrictions lifted or obtain the property outright. Presently, RCC is aggressively lobbying for a legislative land exchange that would give them title to Oak Flat. If they succeed, climbers will both lose access to Oak Flat as well as negotiating leverage in obtaining alternate climbing locations. We can defeat this land exchange and save Oak Flat if we maintain a unified voice opposing a land exchange and write our elected officials in support of the Friends of Queen Creek's mission.

What we must communicate together is that we're not anti-mine, but rather the FoQC believe that there is a way to mine the copper under Oak Flat without destroying the surface. Although RCC (and its numerous PR firms) has effectively presented a mining proposal with enormous economic benefits to Arizona, they also insist that public access to Oak Flat-with its unique and irreplaceable bouldering access-must be closed forever because of the possibility of massive subsidence from the mine. The FoQC's "win-win" scenario is possible because (1) the law is on our side, and (2) it has been proven elsewhere that profitable mines can be done in such a way that maintains the environmental and ecological integrity of the landscape.

The efforts of the Access Fund and FoQC have led to a coalition that includes over a thousand FoQC members, the Arizona Mountaineering Club, local chapters of the Sierra Club and Audubon Society, members of the outdoor industry, motorized enthusiasts, canyoneering groups, Arizona businesses, academics, and watchdog organizations that focus on public land policy, mining law and federal land exchanges. The Access Fund is also working with respected and experienced mining engineers and public interest law groups who specialize in mining issues. Together, our unified voice can save Oak Flat.

RCC will be pushing for a land swap early in 2005. There is currently far too little information for anyone, including your elected officials, to support this proposal.

Right now the most important thing is for the FoQC and its supporters to write their legislators in opposition to this impending land exchange bill. Please research the issue (beyond rumor swapped at the crag, local pub or internet sites) and support the FoQC's work to find a better way for RCC to contribute to the AZ economy without taking from the AZ environment.

For more information about how to contact your elected officials on this issue, see http://www.accessfund.org/programs/Queen_letter_6_04.html or email the Access Fund's Policy Director Jason Keith at jason@accessfund.org.