

**Testimony of Rosemary Shearer
Executive Director, Superstition Area Land Trust
before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Forests and Public Lands
concerning
S. 409, Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act of 2009**

June 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony. My name is Rosemary Shearer. I am a founding member and the Executive Director of the Superstition Area Land Trust, a 501(c)(3) non-profit conservation organization. We are known by our acronym, SALT. Some may ask, and quite frankly a few have, why would a conservation organization appear before a Senate panel in support of a copper mining operation? A brief history:

SALT was founded 1993 by residents living near the Superstition Mountains. Our primary mission is to protect our open spaces and educate the public about the Sonoran Desert. Our directors come from the diverse backgrounds of academia, historical societies, artists, planners, ranchers, architects, businesses and conservationists. Funding comes from individual members, grants, bequests, foundations, and 404 in lieu fees.

In our sixteen years SALT has built partnerships with government agencies and civic organizations as we acquired lands for preservation and engaged in public projects. We participate in regional planning, education and grassroots advocacy, all of which has underscored an awareness that a healthy economy is a vehicle for conservation efforts,

We are located in Pinal County which historically has relied on copper, cotton and cattle as an economic base. In recent years Pinal County, the size of the state of Connecticut, has morphed into a widespread series of urbanized bedroom communities where residents commute to Phoenix and Tucson to work. Surrounded by hundreds of thousands of acres of some of the most scenic publicly owned lands in North America, recreation has been added to the economy. Still there are few local job opportunities. The vitality and future social wellbeing of the region is of major concern to all.

SALT's position on S. 409 was carefully considered and not arrived at easily. As the definitive conservation organization in the area affected by Resolution's proposed mining operation, we believe that we have the most to gain or lose from the provisions of this bill. Many of our members have hiked, camped, climbed and enjoyed the awe-inspiring landscapes around the 2,400 acres that will be affected by Resolution Copper's activities

This is a complicated issue. The land in the area of this project is unquestionably scenic and beautiful. However, a rich body of copper ore, perhaps one of the largest in the world, lays deep beneath the very ground so many have treasured for decades. How ironic – a treasure beneath a treasure. The sobering truth is that someone will go after it.

Therein lays the dilemma. Who will that someone be? Will they employ traditional mining methods, virtually unchanged over the last century, producing more waste dumps and tailings impoundments to further deface the landscape of Eastern Pinal County? Or will newly developing mining techniques, leaving the air clean and the surface of the land largely undisturbed be employed? Either venture will employ men and women for decades in an economically depressed area. Either method would extract the ore – but what heritage would it leave behind? These are all very important questions and ones that we have sought answers to and will continue to explore.

SALT considers Resolution Copper's current reclamation at the abandoned Magma Mine in Superior, along with their plan to backfill the abandoned Pinto Valley mine, as a demonstration of their commitment to adherence to the provisions of S. 409, and to remaining a vital partner in the region's future.

Members of our organization, including myself, have visited many of the properties in the exchange package. Among the 5,556 acres in the exchange is the 7B Ranch, adding almost seven miles of protection to the San Pedro River watershed. Also included are The Pond and Dripping Springs, both superb hiking and climbing locations; the JI Ranch which will provide a future scenic camping area near Oak Creek campground, which Resolution has promised to keep open until a new one is built. An additional 100 acres of their private land adjacent to Apache Leap has been added, guaranteeing conservation for this signature landscape which towers above Superior. SALT stands ready to play a significant role as management plans and easements are developed on the preserve areas.

And so, in conclusion, and after careful consideration of all the factors, we consider the passage of S. 409 beneficial to the region.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on this legislation and am prepared to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.

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