



O'odham Rights

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Ofelia Rivas, Founder
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Declaration for the Ancestors and Descendants of O'odham Lands and O'odham Sacred (Holy) Places

**Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) State Transportation Board
ADOT Five Year Program
Communication and Community Partnerships
206 South 17th Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85007**

RE: Opposition Statement to the South Mountain Extension to the Loop 202

My name is Ofelia Rivas. I am O'odham. I come from a place called Ali Jegk (Little Clearing), a village in the O'odham territory now known as the Tohono O'odham Nation - a federally recognized Indian reservation here in the state of Arizona.

The original lands of the O'odham are vast and extend north to what is now Phoenix, east to the San Pedro River, south to Hermosillo (Sonora, Mexico) and west to what is now called the Sea of Cortez. Throughout our lands are permanent and temporary communities and sacred (holy) places.

Prior to the invasion of O'odham lands by the Spaniards, and later by the Anglo Americans, all the bands of O'odham co-existed and interacted with each other. They worked together and celebrated the harvest along the rivers of Ke'le Ak'mel (Gila River) and Gu Ak'mel (Salt River).

The O'odham had trading routes that connected all the O'odham. They traded goods such as sea salt from the south and grains of original O'odham wheat and barley from the river areas. Historically, the O'odham were united to insure the protection of sacred places and their people. Our traditional history is an oral history which records the formation of our lands, including the volcanic eruptions which formed our landscape and the sacred (holy) mountains.

Throughout the O'odham lands the mountains are regarded as Elders that maintain the ancient history and stories of the O'odham. The mountains are regarded as sacred (holy), and a living part of Mother Earth. They are identified as female or male. They are given special offerings by each O'odham, including the singing of each mountain's specific song. The offerings are conducted to honor the mountain's purpose on the land. Offerings can be cornmeal or other sacred ceremonial herbal medicines. The offering song names the mountain and the story it tells.

Muhadag Do'ag, the mountain out of which the proposed freeway extension to the 202 is to be carved, is a sacred (holy) male mountain. It is the keeper of the stories of the sacred bear in O'odham history. Muhadag Do'ag is a healing mountain and is a vital part of the well-being of all O'odham and their culture.

As a young woman of 25, I was traveling through the region accompanied an Elder from a southern O'odham village now known as Caborca, in Sonora, Mexico. As we were approaching the sacred mountain of Muhadag Do'ag, she started talking about her grandfather who told the history and sang the song of the mountain. She told me about the history of the mountain and the story of the bear. She remembered the song and she sang the sacred song. Muhadag Do'ag stands there to teach the O'odham about the region and the history of the O'odham.

Today the O'odham face many alterations to our Him'dag - our way of life. Our people are segregated by arbitrary borders. Our lands are divided by international, federal, state, and local institutions of political supremacy. The best example is the arbitrary international border that cuts in half the traditional O'odham lands, leaving part in Mexico, and part in the United States.

These deliberate alterations are attempts to weaken our culture and our connection to the land. The destruction of Muhadag Do'ag for the freeway extension would be a continuation of this deliberate process of disconnecting the O'odham from their land which itself is part of a campaign of cultural genocide against the O'odham - the original people of the land.

We pray in O'odham for Muhadag Do'ag, and for the future of all O'odham. May he continue to stand, sacred, strong, and tall for all people of the region. May you understand his purpose. He is an ancient man, who is there for healing and protection.

We's 'th Ha-jun We'he-jed

Please do not allow the construction of this freeway!

**Ofelia Rivas
Founder of the O'odham Rights**