

Years after he resurrected his political fortunes from the Keating Five savings and loan investigation, John McCain promoted an Arizona land swap that would have benefited a former mentor and partner of the scandal's central figure.

Nearby residents and environmentalists, however, wanted to preserve the area's unusual cacti, stone formations and hundreds of Hopi Indian tribal artifacts.

After opposition surfaced, the developer sought McCain's help in forging a land swap with the U.S. Forest Service - a deal that also would benefit the owners of the ranch, including a company controlled by billionaire Carl H. Lindner Jr., an associate of S&L chief Charles H. Keating.

McCain and an aide pushed for the exchange in more than a half-dozen sometimes-testy letters and phone calls up and down the Forest Service's hierarchy, according to former agency officials and correspondence. McCain's office even circulated draft legislation that would have overridden the agency's objection to surrendering national forest land. Ultimately, the deal fell apart.

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