

# Would Temecula-area quarry help or hurt economy?

**Carl Love, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 8-11-10**

As the recession grinds on, do the economic benefits of the quarry proposed near Temecula look more tempting?

Like a steak dangling in front of a hungry wolf, that's what politicians must consider.

Liberty Quarry is projected to generate \$6 million in annual state sales taxes and more than \$2 million a year for Riverside County. The quarry also would create 99 jobs on site, company officials say.

The jobs are a big deal in an area with unemployment well over 10 percent. As for the taxes, California is just a little broke.

Gary Johnson, aggregate resource manager, says, "It's frustrating that Granite is prepared to help when so many skilled people are out of work and our state is in such a serious economic crisis."

The company is churning out news releases and buying newspaper ads to tout the benefits.

Supporters such as salesman Vince Davis, of Temecula, say the jobs will be well-paying and boost the economy.

Temecula City Councilman Mike Naggar isn't buying Granite's version of economic stimulus.

"It's like suggesting mining granite at Half Dome in Yosemite," he says. "There are no major economic benefits to it and any economic benefits that would offer could never offset the residual economic devastation the quarry would cause, not to mention the problematic health consequences."

Also questioning the benefits is Kathleen Hamilton, president of Save Our Southwest Hills, which opposes the project.

Hamilton wonders about those in the rural De Luz area west of Temecula. With the loud work going on, "They would be affected big time." That won't help their property values, she contends.

Then there is the economic benefit we get from the clean air we have compared to the rest of So Cal. Think how many people move here because of it, Hamilton notes. Then think of the economic harm if the quarry fouls our air, she argues.

Last, the quarry would be near the Santa Margarita River Ecological Reserve, which has generated "well over" \$1 million a year the past decade in research investments from scientists, says Matt Rahn, the site's director of research.

Over the next 75 years, the area is projected to attract another \$400 million in such funding. Allowing the quarry, Rahn says, would be like placing a rock concert next to a monastery. Scientific researchers won't be as interested, he argues.

Granite spokeswoman Karie Reuther says the critics have it all wrong. She says studies show homeowners in De Luz will be too far from the site to be affected. On air quality, she says reports shows there will be no effect. Granite also will monitor the air and, if there is a problem, adjustments will be made, she says.

As for Rahn's objection, she says studies show it won't be an issue.

Here's one thing we can all agree is loud -- the contentious debate over this project.