

# Study -- enough water to serve Temecula-area quarry

**Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 12-18-10**

Staff for a regional water district have determined there is enough water for the district to serve the proposed Liberty Quarry outside Temecula.

But opponents of the project question how the Western Municipal Water District can say water is available for the open-pit mine given statewide water supply problems.

Western's board of directors voted 4-1 Wednesday to approve a water supply assessment for the quarry, sought for a 414-acre site south of Temecula and west of Interstate 15.

The quarry is one of the most talked-about and contentious issues in the Temecula Valley. Quarry developer Granite Construction maintains the quarry will provide high-paying jobs and a local source of building materials.

Critics, including the Temecula City Council, say the quarry would lead to air pollution, increased truck traffic and environmental ruin. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors will ultimately decide whether the quarry gets a permit.

The assessment was done at the request of county planners, who want to include the study as part of a massive environmental analysis of the quarry. The county's request followed a court ruling that concluded projects such as the quarry need water supply assessments.

Granite spokeswoman Karie Reuther said the board's vote moves the environmental impact report process forward. The draft report could be finalized or the county could issue a new draft; it's not clear when either would happen.

The Riverside-based district's staff looked at current and future demand and water supplies for the next 20 years under various scenarios, including multiple dry years.

They found enough water was available to serve the quarry and meet the district's other obligations. The quarry is expected to use 205 acre-feet of water in its first year; an acre-foot is enough to supply two families for a year. By its 10th year, the quarry is projected to need 369 acre-feet.

The assessment would require the quarry to use untreated water and for Granite to pay for the construction and upkeep for a pump station and pipeline.

District spokesman Phil Rosentrater said the assessment does not guarantee water for the quarry. Nor is the district taking a position on the quarry itself, he said.

Maybe it should, said Jim Mitchell of the local Sierra Club chapter. Mitchell, whose group opposes the quarry, said the board's approval of the assessment doesn't make sense, given a California water crisis that has resulted in supply cutbacks and growers having to shrink their crops.

While the assessment is for 20 years and the quarry has a projected 75-year lifespan, Mitchell said he doubts Western will cut off the water after the quarry turns 20.

Fred Bartz, a member of the anti-quarry group Save Our Southwest Hills, questions why Western says there's

enough water given recent studies, including one by the Natural Resources Defense Council and others showing Riverside County is at severe risk of running out of water. He noted the Temecula-based Rancho California Water District, which gets water wholesale from Western, has seen its water deliveries cut.

Rosentrater said Western has a number of practices and programs in place to retain more water.