

300 attend quarry permit hearing

Jessica Bernstein-Wax, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 9-15-10

About 300 people on Tuesday night flooded a Marin County supervisors hearing on a permit that would let the at-times controversial San Rafael Rock Quarry continue operations at its Point San Pedro site.

The proposal from Marin County public works staff includes the operating permit as well as a reclamation plan with 173 conditions for the quarry, whose fraught history includes permit violations, disputes with neighbors, litigation and court orders.

"I know you all have been at this for a long time, and there are strong feelings on both sides," board president Judy Arnold told the packed room. "You look like a really refined audience, but I just want to remind you that we're going to have no booing or cheering."

The proposed conditions would limit quarry truck trips to 250 a day - with 125 entering the quarry and 125 exiting - and regulate annual production, noise and dust, according to a report presented at the meeting by Public Works Director Farhad Mansourian and Senior Civil Engineer Eric Steger.

If approved, the proposal also would restrict operations from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays but allow the quarry to stay open until 10 p.m. for up to 50 days per year - but not on Fridays.

Hours for barge loading would be 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday and up to 26 Fridays and Saturdays each year, Steger said.

Officials would require the quarry to fund 1.5 full-time Marin County staff positions to ensure compliance.

At Tuesday night's meeting, the Dutra Group, which has owned the business since 1986, and the Point San Pedro Road Coalition, which has opposed the quarry and was a plaintiff in a 2004 lawsuit against it, each gave 20-minute presentations before public comment began.

Dave Crutcher, a member of the coalition, criticized the proposal for allowing the quarry to operate until 10 p.m. on almost 70 percent of Saturdays and 71 percent of the calendar year.

"In Marin County we never see daylight (up to) 10 p.m. even in the most northern parts of the county," Crutcher said. "It is proposed, however, to allow them to mine and barge loudly until 10 p.m. all those nights, and that's not right."

The coalition also said it is worried about the county's ability to monitor air quality compliance at the quarry, among other concerns.

Aimi Dutra Krause, whose family owns San Rafael-based Dutra Group, noted that her company has already made \$11 million in improvements at the quarry since 2004 and hasn't had any violations in that period.

"The quarry can accept the conditions of approval as staff has recommended them, but we cannot afford to reduce these operations further," Dutra Krause said. "It's simply not possible to reduce these hours further and remain a viable business."

In 2004, Marin Superior Court Judge John Sutro criticized the Dutra Group for expanding mining operations without permits. At the same time, the court said Dutra had the right to make a fair profit by mining the quarry bowl without regard to depth or duration, and the right to mine portions of the property known as South Hill.

Sutro called the quarry - which provides rock riprap for Delta levees and emergency flood protection, gravel, asphaltic concrete and sand for local roads and other public work - a valuable asset of regional importance.

Scores of residents and business owners lined up to speak Tuesday night wearing stickers emblazoned with "Support San Rafael Rock Quarry," "No Night Operation" and "Fewer Trucks."

Resident Dorothy Soares said she has lived near the quarry for about 60 years and has seen "many improvements."

"Having an operating quarry is a Marin County asset," Soares said.

Dave Trahan of Patriot Mechanical in San Rafael echoed that sentiment and urged supervisors to approve the proposed permit.

"I believe there are certain individuals who would like to see the quarry close," Trahan said. "It's your job as community leaders to come to a fair and common ground. Don't regulate them out of existence."

But Amanda Metcalf, who lives across from the quarry and was a plaintiff in the lawsuit, called the county proposal "absurd."

"A rock quarry a stone's throw away from homes operating until 10 at night is just ridiculous," Metcalf said.

Loch Lomond resident Marie Fisher agreed and said late-night work at the quarry prevents neighborhood children from getting a good night's rest.

"What about our quality of life?" Fisher said. "The quarry is our neighbor. They are here no doubt about it. They're not a great neighbor."

The issue will come before the board again at 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 28.