

# **Proposed quarry elicits protest in Santa Margarita**

**Bob Cuddy, San Luis Obispo Tribune, 4-18-11**

Residents in and around Santa Margarita are mounting a protest against a quarry developer who wants to build on 23 acres four miles east of the North County community.

A group called Margarita Proud argues that the plan has a slew of problems, the most significant of which is traffic.

The proposed quarry could generate as many as 200 truck trips along twisting Highway 58 and through the community every day when it is fully operational, Margarita Proud contends.

The rock and aggregate quarry would be located at 660 Calf Canyon Highway, on Highway 58 at the Salinas River Bridge.

Roy Reeves of Margarita Proud adds that his group is concerned about the firm chosen by the county Planning and Building Department to prepare an environmental impact report for the project, Benchmark Associates, “because they are a mining industry consultant, and we don’t think we will get a fair product.”

They cite Benchmark’s own website as evidence.

According to the website, Bruce Steubing, Benchmark’s principal and vice president, once gave a presentation titled “Obtaining Permits and Approvals with Entrenched Project Opposition.” His audience was the California Construction and Industrial Materials Association.

It was to “provide attendees with pragmatic recommendations on how to navigate the California Environmental Quality Act process when faced with entrenched opposition. The talk will use recent examples, such as the Madera Quarry Project, to illustrate ways to overcome the difficulties of permitting a new mine today in California,” the website states.

Reeves said his group wants the county to hire what it considers an impartial consultant.

However, Jeff Oliveira of the county planning department says the county has done that with Benchmark.

“There is no indication” that Benchmark is biased, Oliveira said.

Representatives from Benchmark and the developer could not be reached for comment.

Oliveira said that Benchmark was not on the county’s original list of consultants and was the high bidder for the EIR contract. The county expanded its list beyond the dozen original firms.

“We wanted a firm with expertise in mining extraction,” Oliveira said.

In addition to the EIR and traffic, Margarita Proud is worried about water, noise, dust and other issues, Reeves said.

“The next step,” Oliveira said, “is to get the EIR contract finalized and sent to the Board of Supervisors on

consent agenda for approval.” No date has been set.

He said public hearings are roughly a year away.