

Report on Temecula-area quarry details monitoring programs

Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 3-26-11

Programs to monitor air quality and vibrations from explosives blasting at a proposed quarry bordering Temecula are two additions to the final version of a mammoth environmental study of the project.

Riverside County and the South Coast Air Quality Management District would supervise air monitoring at Liberty Quarry, an open-pit aggregate mine planned for a 414-acre site just west of Interstate 15. The program would check air quality and report results to the county and the public each quarter.

Also, county planners, as well as county fire and sheriff's officials, would have to sign off on a plan to monitor blasting vibrations.

If the measurements were to exceed certain thresholds, all blasting would cease and quarry developer Granite Construction would have to file a report showing how it would fix the problem and "reduce vibration intensity to below control limits," according to the final draft of the environmental impact report.

The county on Thursday afternoon released the 6,800-page report, more than a month before the county Planning Commission hosts the first of two hearings on the quarry, the most divisive land-use issue in the recent Temecula Valley history.

Gary Johnson, Granite aggregate resource development manager, said the monitoring programs are similar to what's in place at Rosemary's Mountain Quarry, a Granite-run quarry in Fallbrook.

By state law, the final report had to come out at least 10 days before the first hearing, which is scheduled for 4 p.m. April 26 at Temecula's Rancho Community Church. The second hearing is set for 4 p.m. May 3 at the church. Thousands could turn out for both.

Granite wants to extract aggregate -- a key building material used in concrete and asphalt -- by blasting away rock at the site. Concrete and asphalt also would be made at the quarry, which would be active for 75 years.

Granite officials say the quarry will provide high-paying jobs, millions annually in tax revenue and a sorely needed local aggregate source. In a news release, Granite said the final report proves the quarry would be environmentally friendly and improve air quality by taking diesel-spewing trucks off local roads.

lots of comments

Quarry opponents maintain the project will harm Temecula and surrounding areas by sending microscopic, unhealthy dust particles into the air. They said the quarry would lead to more truck traffic, noise and light pollution and ruin a neighboring ecological reserve.

On March 8, the Temecula City Council passed a resolution opposing the quarry. The resolution also slammed the draft environmental study as misleading, incomplete and a piece of pro-quarry propaganda.

The state Environmental Quality Act guided the report's creation. Granite paid a San Bernardino-based consultant to assemble the report, which was reviewed by county planners. The draft came out in 2009.

The county received 232 pieces of correspondence on the draft report from local, state and federal agencies as well as from individuals, groups and businesses.

Johnson of Granite said the monitoring programs are two of the most significant additions to the final report. Others, he said, include a Western Municipal Water District requirement that non-potable water be used at the quarry and a Caltrans request for additional improvements to the Rainbow Valley Boulevard interchange on Interstate 15.

'be engaged'

While making no judgment on the quarry, the report concludes the project will have "significant and unavoidable" effects on traffic and air quality.

But those two areas also would be affected if the quarry is never built, since diesel trucks will still have to travel long distances to haul aggregate, the report found. Johnson said the term "significant and unavoidable" is misunderstood, since the region already has levels of traffic and air pollution considered to be too high.

"A finding of significance means that a certain planning level has been exceeded and therefore mitigation is required," he wrote in an email. "It does not necessarily mean that the project will adversely impact or be noticed by residents."

Johnson added that "significant and unavoidable" was used to describe environmental effects of Temecula's recent 4,510-acre annexation, which includes land adjacent to the quarry site. Nearly all of the annexed land is undeveloped.

Temecula Councilwoman Maryann Edwards, who sits on the council's Liberty Quarry subcommittee, said Friday she hadn't had time to review the final report, though city officials are poring over it.

"I don't know if there are any suggestions to mitigate the impacts of a project of that magnitude," she said. "Clearly since they haven't changed the final (report), they aren't able to mitigate any of those negative impacts to Temecula and points east."

She said the city is encouraging people to attend the county Planning Commission hearings.

"We certainly hope that the residents of Temecula will show up and be engaged," Edwards said.