

Three quarry info sessions scheduled next week

First is in Temecula on Tuesday, others in Corona and Hemet

Aaron Claverie, Escondido North County Times, 4-8-11

The scientists and consultants who have crunched the numbers on Granite Construction's Liberty Quarry project are coming to Temecula on Tuesday night for the first of three open house info sessions that Granite is hosting.

The other two sessions ---- scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday nights ---- will be in Corona and Hemet.

Granite Project Manager Gary Johnson said the company decided to conduct sessions in Corona and Hemet ---- cities well north of the proposed quarry site ---- to explain to residents in those parts of the county how truck traffic will be reduced in their neighborhoods if Liberty Quarry is approved.

"Those areas stand to benefit substantially by reduced truck traffic," he said.

The Northern California-based company has proposed operating the mine within a 400-acre property that sits between the San Diego County line and Temecula's southern border. At full capacity, the 135-acre quarry is expected to generate 5 million tons of aggregate rock at the site, which is just east of the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve.

According to Granite's projections, about 70 percent of the aggregate generated at Liberty Quarry would be headed south to San Diego County.

On April 26, the Riverside County Planning Commission will conduct the first of two scheduled hearings on the quarry, which has been hotly debated in Southwest County, as well as Fallbrook and Rainbow, because of concerns that include the negative effects it could have on air quality, traffic, the migratory paths of animals and other environmental issues.

The quarry is supported by people who point to the jobs it will produce and the tax revenue it will generate.

The county, in its review of the project, has determined that the project is "environmentally superior" to not digging a quarry, in part, because of the air quality benefits from reduced truck traffic.

The county's environmental documentation predicts that, if Granite's projections are accurate, the quarry will eliminate millions of miles of truck travel along Riverside County roads because developers in San Diego County will no longer be buying aggregate from quarries in the Corona area and other points north of the county line.

Johnson said Thursday that the consultants and scientists scheduled to appear next week will be able to discuss all of the traffic and air quality studies that were used by the county to make that prediction. Opponents of the project have criticized the prediction because they say there is no way to guarantee that the majority of the aggregate will be sent south.

Without a guarantee ---- a guarantee that the county said it can't legally require ---- they say there is no way to predict how the region's air quality will be affected beyond the boost in dust and particulates that will be directly tied to operation of the mine.

Besides the air quality and traffic consultants, Johnson said experts will also be on hand during next week's sessions to discuss water quality, geology, migratory animals, quarry operations and noise.

Before scheduling the April 26 hearing, the county released a new set of requirements on the project meant to address worries about vibration from blasting at the quarry, air quality and the area's water supplies.

If the project is approved, Granite would be required to install air quality monitoring stations and measure vibration, and to use only non-drinking water for operations.

Johnson said those new measures also would be covered at the sessions.

Mike Jurkosky, a Rainbow resident who lives near the proposed quarry site, said he doesn't plan to attend any of the sessions, saying that he has already sifted through the environmental documentation and found it lacking.

"I've heard it all," he said. "They've paid for a very expensive, flawed report. How do I challenge it? Anytime you say something, they start waving that (environmental impact report) around."

Another project critic, Cheryl Alkema of De Luz, said she doesn't plan to attend a session either.

"I'm not interested in anything Granite has to do with," she said. "We've been involved from Day 1 and we're well aware of everything."

Instead of attending a session, Alkema said, she will continue working to help increase turnout for the upcoming commission hearing, which is set for 4 p.m. April 26 at Rancho Community Church, 31300 Rancho Community Way in Temecula.