

Tuolumne County Supervisors Approve Cooperstown Mine

Richard Paloma, Oakdale Leader, 4-14-11

In an expected move on Tuesday April 5, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors approved a 135-acre mine located in southwest Tuolumne County, adjacent to Stanislaus County, off Cooperstown Road.

Jack and Tricia Gardella and The Resource Exploration and Drilling Company proposed the project that will mine over 55 million tons of crushed rock over a 75-year period. The mined rock would be used for road construction, railroad track ballast and other industrial uses.

Over the last couple of months the project has drawn criticism from Oakdale and Riverbank officials who are concerned their towns will suffer the brunt of the endeavor while Tuolumne County receives the benefits. Riverbank City Council members, in fact, voted unanimously at a meeting on Monday, April 11 to file a lawsuit in hopes of blocking the project.

The plan calls for the Sierra Railroad to carry the mined crushed rock from the Cooperstown mine site through Oakdale to Riverbank where it will be transferred to Burlington Northern Santa Fe trains.

In addition to the trains that would travel through the two towns making two back-and-forth trips and causing possible traffic delays, others were concerned that the project was going ahead without an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and was in violation of The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 – commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, which restricts the use of open space land.

“I saw it coming,” said Bonnie Fogarty. “I’m very disappointed with the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors.”

Fogarty owns property adjacent to the site that has a ranch for cattle grazing. She’s concerned about the noise, pollution, and water quality that are going to be affected by the quarry’s operation.

Attorney Andrew Grundman, representing unnamed clients, has not given up hope and has informed Tuolumne County officials he intends to file a petition and complaint under the California Environmental Quality Act. Grundman alleges that Tuolumne County abused its discretion in approving the project based on an inadequate and unlawful mitigated negative declaration. Grundman believes the project still requires an EIR and the county avoided the Williamson Act.

“Dividing the project into five stages does not get around the threshold,” stated Grundman. “I want them to consider they’re not in a black hole after approving (the mine).”

Oakdale Community Development Director Danelle Stylos said that the Tuolumne supervisors added conditions to the project that she’s satisfied with that included meeting with the stakeholders of Riverbank and Oakdale and limiting the train hours of operation and car length. They’ve already had a March 23 meeting with the railroad, the developers, and representatives from Oakdale and Riverbank.

Stylos added that the mine site would also build a helipad at the facility for emergencies.

When contacted on Wednesday following the mine’s approval on April 5, Oakdale City Manager Steve Hallam said he had not received any direction from the city council to take any additional actions regarding the quarry project and did not know if any further action would follow.