

# Final report on quarry details new air quality, traffic measures

*County added the proposed regulations in response to public concerns*

**Aaron Claverie, Escondido North County Times, 3-26-11**

The final environmental report on Granite Construction's Liberty Quarry project released this week proposes new regulations related to air quality and traffic that were added to the planning document in response to concerns about the project.

The Northern California-based company has proposed operating an open-pit mine on 400 acres between the San Diego County line and Temecula's southern border. Once running at full capacity, the 135-acre quarry is expected to generate 5 million tons of aggregate at the site, which is just east of the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve.

If the quarry is eventually approved by the county, those proposed regulations will force Granite to install air quality monitoring stations near the quarry and share their data with the public. Granite has offered to put the stations in at Temecula City Hall, on the reserve and at a location chosen by the school district.

The company also will be required to build new on- and offramps at the Interstate 15-Rainbow Valley Boulevard interchange to accommodate the trucks that will be chugging back and forth to the site.

Other new regulations, added after the county received more than 200 comments on the draft version of the environmental report, include:

- Requiring Granite to create a vibration-monitoring program to ensure vibrations resulting from blasts at the site do not exceed certain thresholds.
- Using only non-drinkable water for quarry operations, a requirement tacked on by Western Municipal Water District.

The 8,500-page report, a document that will be used by county officials who will determine whether the project should be approved, was released Thursday.

## **'Superior' option**

Just as the draft report did, the final report says reducing the footprint of the quarry from 155 acres to 135 acres is the most "environmentally superior alternative."

The county has determined that digging a quarry is better for the environment than not digging one, because if the quarry is in operation, big rigs that deliver aggregate material to San Diego County using Interstate 15, traveling through the Murrieta/Temecula corridor, will be removed from the roads.

Granite has said about two-thirds of the aggregate it expects to produce at the quarry is bound for San Diego County.

The report was uploaded to the county's website about 30 days before the Planning Commission's April 26 hearing on the project, according to a county planner, to give the public more time to digest and pore over the

information: technical studies and reports on subjects such as the quarry's potential effects on air quality, traffic, noise, animal migration patterns and water quality.

That hearing, which will be held at Rancho Community Church in Temecula, is the first of two the commission has scheduled to review the project. The second is scheduled for May 3. The decision to hold two hearings was made because of intense local interest in the quarry.

The project, which has been working its way through the county's planning pipeline for years, is opposed by a coalition that includes the city of Temecula, the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians, residents of the San Diego County community of Rainbow and a group of Temecula-area residents called Save Our Southwest Hills.

Supporters say it will provide 99 high-paying jobs and generate \$300 million in new tax revenue for the county over the course of its 50-year lifespan. Opponents say it will threaten the area's allure as a tourist destination ---- with attractions including the Pechanga casino and the area's Wine Country ---- and end up harming the county's economy. They're also worried about the dust, traffic snarls and noise the project could generate.

### **Granite reaction**

Discussing the new regulations proposed in the final report, Granite project manager Gary Johnson said Friday that they are similar to the rules in place at Granite's Rosemary's Mountain Quarry, but not typical requirements for quarry projects.

Regarding the air quality-monitoring program, Johnson said Granite would collect the information and provide it to the community so they can be assured that the company is tracking the emissions ---- primarily dust from the quarry operations and exhaust from trucks ---- that the quarry is generating.

"It should give them a huge level of comfort that this stuff is being monitored," he said.

In a section of the report that addresses the greenhouse gases the quarry might produce, included as part of the state's efforts to monitor the environmental effects of large developments, the new total is listed at 80,000 tons per year.

That total, according to the county, will not hinder or delay the state's efforts to reduce its production of greenhouse gases.

That 80,000-ton figure does not include the emissions that would be reduced ---- 50,000 tons per year ---- if the quarry's operation results in trucks being removed from county roads.

The report states that although there are regional benefits to air quality from the proposed project, the county took a conservative approach that called "significant" any new source of pollution that contributes to a net increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

"As such, the proposed project's air quality impacts related to criteria pollutants and greenhouse gases are cumulatively considerable, significant and unavoidable," the report states.

Johnson said the terms "significant" and "unavoidable" are being used in this context because air quality in the area is already bad, based on the low thresholds that are used as part of the environmental review of new projects.

Projects, including the hospital proposed for land near the corner of Temecula Parkway and Margarita Road in Temecula, also create similar "unavoidable" impacts.

### **Need for aggregate**

Another section of the report addresses how the quarry will help satisfy the need for aggregate in Southern California.

"As of 2005, the San Diego and western Riverside County area had less than 25 percent of the permitted aggregate reserves needed to meet the projected 50-year demand," the report states.

According to a California Geological Survey report published in 2006, San Diego County construction-aggregate production in 2005 was approximately 10 million tons, and construction aggregate demand exceeded 16.5 million tons.

Since 2005 and 2006, the economy has been hammered and the demand for aggregate has declined.

Fred Bartz ---- a member of two organizations that are opposing the quarry project, Save Our Southwest Hills and Clean Air Temecula ---- said a lot of things have changed since 2005, especially the demand for aggregate.

"The building boom is gone," he said, adding that the county's use of that old information is troubling.

Although Bartz and other quarry opponents haven't yet had time to fully dissect the new report, he did say that based on an initial review, it appears that the consultant who worked to address the comments made on the draft report may not have fully understood a number of the public's concerns.

"We are disappointed in some of the consultant's responses," he said, adding that he was pleased the county released the document early to allow for a more thorough review.