

Short on stone, quarry seeks expansion

Quarry is crucial source of erosion control material

Mark Noack, Half Moon Bay Review, 3-1-11

For more than 40 years, when builders needed rock, concrete or sand, there was pretty much only one local option on the Peninsula - Pilarcitos Quarry.

But after a lifetime of churning out about 600,000 tons each year, the quarry is now running low on its granite reserves. Officials say it will run out within three years. Officials at the quarry now say the only way to sustain local granite supply is to dig further out, not further down.

West Coast Aggregates, which leases the quarry, is currently finishing up environmental permits for a proposed 147-acre expansion that would provide enough granite for 70 more years. County officials are reviewing the final Environmental Impact Report for the mining expansion and expect a decision in the coming months.

The Coastsides only mining operation is hidden off Highway 92 and remains mostly unknown to the wider public. However, the materials produced by the quarry are ubiquitous throughout the Coastsides.

The quarry provides an estimated 90 percent of the stone materials for the greater Half Moon Bay area. Those aggregate materials include concrete for building, asphalt for roads and - perhaps most important for the Coastsides - sand and rock to prevent land erosion. Pilarcitos Quarry provides sand for all the sandbags used to prevent flooding throughout the Coastsides.

"This is it, considering we're the only quarry operation on the Coastsides," said company president Dick DeAtley. "There is always more need for these materials, and that need keeps coming back."

The quarry currently leases more than 500 acres of land off of Highway 92 in Nuff Creek Canyon, but it is only permitted to mine about 53 acres. The operation lies within the coastal zone, meaning any effort to expand is subject to the Coastal Act and can be appealed to the California Coastal Commission.

So far, quarry officials say they've spent six years and more than \$600,000 to make the case for expansion with San Mateo County officials, and they've recruited some odd bedfellows. Lennie Roberts, legislative advocate from the Committee for Green Foothills, said quarry officials have addressed many environmental concerns about the project and have agreed to provide a conservation easement for endangered species.

Quarry officials say they expect the county to complete its review of the environmental documents in the coming months.