

Neighbors concerned over proposed quarry expansion

By [Name], Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 11-1-13

A quarry in the hills between Santa Rosa and Calistoga is asking Sonoma County supervisors to expand to a neighboring property, but owners say it will not represent a major increase in the amount of rock being mined.

The quarry already has permission to annually mine up to 500,000 cubic yards, or about 750,000 cubic feet of hard rock known as aggregate, highly prized as the base for roads, building foundations and other construction projects. The quarry had been digging steadily northward on the 8-acre property until it reached an expected patch of volcanic rock that is not useful for gravel and other rock products.

The proposed expansion, on a 3-acre site to the west, will allow the Porter Creek Road quarry to follow the same rock that it has been mining since 1910, said county planner Sigrid Swedenborg.

"I want to move west so they can stay in the same strata," she said.

The minimum volume of rock coming out of the quarry will not change under the proposal, which will be discussed by the supervisors on Tuesday, Nov. 5, she said. The owner, BoDean Co. of Santa Rosa, is asking the supervisors to rezone the new property for mining and grant a 20-year use permit to dig there.

Neighbors are crying foul, raising concerns about noise, views and a likely increase in truck traffic on the winding roads on the mountain.

"The county really hasn't looked at the impact on everyone here in our forest and our neighborhood," said [Name], operator of the nearby Petrified Forest, a private tourist attraction that features well-preserved redwood trees and other fossilized trees that are more than 3 million years old.

The matter came before the county planning commission in September, Angell complained that the removal of the trees on the new site would damage wildlife and scenic views and would harm the rural character of the area, which is protected by a county plan for the Franz Valley area.

Consultants preparing the environmental impact report on the project, however, said they found no conflict with the Franz Valley plan.

And other residents also raised alarms about the portions of the environmental impact report dealing with truck traffic, showing that the quarry might add between 37 and 59 trips per day by heavy gravel trucks heading west on Highway 101 on Porter Creek Road or east toward Calistoga on Petrified Forest Road.

on. Widening the road into Santa Rosa alone, however, could cost more than \$10 million, and the quarry to pick up roughly a quarter of the cost of eventual widening the road

developer Mike Vranjes said he had planned to develop a number of large nearby forested lots but the new quarry will be visible from two prime hilltop sites.

ey're looking down into a quarry," he said, adding he's decided to sell the entire project in part quarry expansion

said the the environmental report did little to reassure him that the mining would not affect the water supply the lots

rt, however, calls on the quarry to plant trees to screen the work, and hide a large solar array through the operation, within five years. It calls for extensive monitoring of area wells and waterways to ensure mining does not affect water quality or quantity

commissioners agreed with the consultants who prepared the environmental report, who concluded the project doesn't pose a significant threat to the area, at least with some mitigation measures outlined in the report. The five-member commission approved the project unanimously on Sept. 26.

representatives for BoDean did not return a call for comment, but the company has consistently said its operations will not greatly affect the area. Any increase in traffic or other problems are more than offset by the benefits of having a working gravel mine in the area as an alternative to dredging rivers for rock, a traditional practice that has heavily damaged spawning grounds for salmon and trout all along the North Coast, said county and county planners

we've done everything that we can to be good operators and stewards of the land and operate in a socially responsible manner. Landowner Dean Soiland, who bought the quarry in 1986, at a June public hearing. "It's been a great experience for the most part and I think we have had a good relationship with the county and neighbors and we want to continue."