

# Report outlines Azusa mining impacts on Duarte

**Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 12-24-09**

AZUSA - Other than ruining the view of some Duarte residents, a plan to mine a ridge adjacent to Fish Canyon will have limited impact on surrounding communities, according to an environmental study of the proposal.

A draft version of an environmental impact report commissioned by Vulcan Materials Company details the effects of the mining proposal on the San Gabriel Mountains, Fish Creek, local air quality, and the adjoining cities of Azusa and Duarte.

The report was released Tuesday and will be open to public comment until Feb. 5.

Representatives of several government agencies said Wednesday they had not yet reviewed the nearly 1,000-page study.

"The important issues in this project are going to be the aesthetic impacts, the noise impacts, the air quality impacts, the recreation impacts associated with the trails," Azusa Assistant Community Development Director Conal McNamara said. "It is important for this project to be properly analyzed, for the city, for Duarte, for the residents and for the stake holders."

Vulcan operates 110 acres east of Fish Canyon. The company wants to exchange 80 acres of unmined land on its eastern property line for the ability to mine 80 acres near its western property line.

The 270-acre Vulcan property sits in the city of Azusa but rests along the Duarte border. For Vulcan to move forward, Azusa officials would have to approve Vulcan's plan to mine the western 80 acres.

Vulcan's proposal now goes to the city planning commission for a Jan. 13 study session. Public hearings are scheduled for Jan. 27 and Feb. 10.

Other than mining the western edge of the property several alternatives are discussed in the study.

Among them:

Continue mining the eastern 80 acres;

Mining at another spot on the property like the former Fish Canyon Gun Club;

Or, mining both sides of the property, just less on each side.

The study doesn't support those alternatives over Vulcan's designs for a western operation.

"I think the (new) plan is superior and so far what I have read in the environmental impact report suggests it is a far superior plan than the other alternatives being evaluated," Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest said.

Part of Vulcan's proposal calls for the western mining operation to incorporate micro benches. Company officials said when mining is complete and the mountain is reclaimed, the 1- to 2-foot steps become more naturally part of the mountain slope.

On eastern side the company has carved out 30-foot benches, known as "Mayan steps." If the proposal is approved the entire project would begin to use the micro-benching technique.

"I think you will see, based on the micro benching reclamation, the ridge will look far more natural than it would if it were not reclaimed using micro benching," McNamara said. "At the end of 30 years, hopefully, you will be hard pressed to tell it was a mining operation."

Without approval, micro benching will not be used for future mining at the site, company officials said.

Among those who received a copy of the report were Duarte, Save Our Canyon, the Sierra Club, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, Glendora, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the state Department of Fish and Game and several smaller groups.

Officials with Duarte had no comment Wednesday and said they must first review the more than 800-page report before making any statements.

Save Our Canyon declined comment because it had not yet been able to review it. The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and South Coast Air Quality Management District officials declined for the same reason.

The report shows no significant air quality impacts, but AQMD will do a full analysis, McNamara said.

One stakeholder that requested specific evaluations in the report, the Sierra Club's San Gabriel Valley Task Force, said it will be reviewing the effect on trails leading to Fish Creek that are within the new proposed mining area.

Officials with Vulcan and Duarte - which owns the easement for the trail - have been working on a plan to move the trail west of mining operations, Priest said.

"We have been concerned about how long that trail would be and how difficult it would be to access Fish Canyon," San Gabriel Valley Sierra Club Task Force Co-Chair Joan Licari said.