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San Francisco PUC Lies About Endangered Species

Controversial gravel mine project hit with allegations of government cover-up

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) withheld information on federally threatened and sensitive species along Alameda Creek adjacent to a proposed gravel quarry expansion project in the Sunol Valley, activists revealed in early June. Information about recent sightings of Alameda whipsnakes (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*) and California red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora draytonii*), both designated as federal and state threatened species, was withheld during recent environmental review of the quarry project by the SFPUC and during recent hearings held on the quarry issue by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Planning Commission.

A local field biologist documented red-legged frogs in Alameda Creek just west of the proposed quarry site as recently as April of 2002. A whipsnake was seen in the immediate area as recently as 1998, as well as California tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma californiense*), a species which is a candidate for federal listing and proposed for state listing, western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), a federal species of concern, and nesting of several sensitive birds, including golden eagles, white-tailed kite, and loggerhead shrike.

The SFPUC omitted these sightings near the Water Temple — an historic site in Sunol along the Hetch Hetchy aqueduct, which San Francisco owns — and downplayed the possibility of the species occurring on the project site during the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for their Alameda Watershed Management

Plan. SFPUC representatives also denied the species' presence to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Planning Commission.

"It is a violation of state law and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to withhold information about the presence of sensitive species during the environmental review process for a project," said Jeff Miller, Director of the [Alameda Creek Alliance](#). "We knew the proposed quarry was going to have indirect impacts on Alameda Creek and habitat for sensitive species. We absolutely should have been given this information — it indicates the quarry would directly impact numerous listed species."

The SFPUC and Alameda County Planning Commission have approved the expansion of Mission Valley Rock Company's existing gravel quarry operations, which would destroy an additional 200 acres of public land in the Sunol Valley north of Highway 680. In May 2002, [Save Our Sunol](#), the Alameda Creek Alliance, and the Preserve Area Ridgeland Committee filed a lawsuit against Mission Valley Rock, Alameda County and the City of San Francisco challenging the quarry approval. The lawsuit alleges improper permits, unmitigated impacts to endangered species which require a supplemental EIR, and demands a county-wide referendum under Measure D, the open space initiative passed by Alameda County voters in November 2000.

After testimony from Save Our Sunol and the Alameda Creek Alliance, including documentation of numerous violations by MVR of their air quality and water discharge permits, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in April 2001 requesting the SFPUC and the City Attorney's Office do whatever was necessary to rescind the quarry expansion lease. To date, no response has been made to the resolution. MVR is seeking to circumvent the CEQA requirement for an EIR so that they may expand their current mining operation southeast of Highway 680, deepen existing pits to 200 feet, and mine in a new six-acre plot.

Miller says that the quarry expansion would further fragment populations of the whipsnake and block a critical migration corridor designated as critical habitat for the species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000. The noise, dust, runoff, roads, lights, and other associated effects from the quarry will harass and drive off numerous wildlife species from the area. The expanded quarry pits will also draw additional water from Alameda Creek, reducing stream flow and degrading habitat for amphibians and native fish, such as the threatened steelhead.