

NEW INFORMATION ON ENDANGERED SPECIES AT PROPOSED QUARRY



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Sunol, CA – The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (“SFPUC”) omitted information on federally threatened and sensitive species during environmental review of a proposed gravel quarry expansion project in the Sunol Valley. Information about pre-1994 species sightings along Alameda Creek adjacent to the proposed quarry site was withheld during recent environmental review of the quarry project by the SFPUC and during recent hearings held on the quarry issue by the S. F. Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Planning Commission. The SFPUC was alerted that both the Alameda whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*), a federal and state threatened species, and the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), a candidate species for federal listing, occurred adjacent to Water Temple Field, where the proposed quarry pit will be dug.

A local field biologist documented California red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora draytonii*), another federal and state threatened species, 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. The SFPUC was informed of whipsnakes and tiger salamanders inhabiting the area in 1994, as well as the 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. Most of these sensitive species have previously been documented along Alameda Creek several miles to the south of the Sunol Water Temple. However, the SFPUC omitted these sightings near the Water Temple 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 their occurrence in response to recent inquiries by the S. F. Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Planning Commission.

“The SFPUC properly should have included the 1994 documentation of sensitive species during the recent environmental review processes – we were totally in the dark about their occurrence so close to the project site,” said

Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. “This information as well as the recent sightings indicates the proposed quarry would directly impact listed species.”

The SFPUC and Alameda County Planning Commission have approved a lease to the Mission Valley Rock Company (Surface Mining Permit [“SMP”] 32) to expand existing gravel quarry operations and destroy an additional 200 acres of publicly owned land in the Sunol Valley north of Highway 680. In May 2002, Save Our Sunol, the Alameda Creek Alliance, Save Our Sunol, and the Preserve Area Ridgelands Committee filed a lawsuit against Mission Valley Rock (MVR), 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 vote by the electorate of Alameda County under Measure D, the county Open Space Initiative passed by the 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 S. F. Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in April 2001 requesting the SFPUC and the City Attorney's Office to 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, to dig existing pits deeper to 200 feet and to mine in a 6-acre plot previously un-mined (SMP33). One of the reasons they seek to do this is to provide a place to put the dirt carried over from Water Temple Field (SMP32) as they mine it.

The proposed quarry expansion will further fragment populations of the whipsnake and block a critical migration corridor designated as Critical Habitat for the species by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000. The noise, dust, runoff, roads, lights, and other associated impacts from the quarry will harass and drive off numerous wildlife species from the Water Temple area. The expanded quarry pits will also draw additional water out of Alameda Creek, reducing stream flow and degrading habitat for amphibians and native fish, such as the threatened steelhead trout.

For more information about the quarry lawsuit contact Save Our Sunol at (925) 862-2263 or visit the SOS web site at www.sunol.org.