

Bennett, Jim

From: Rose Masters <rose.neal.masters@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 06, 2015 11:13 PM
To: Bennett, Jim
Subject: PDS2015-MUP-98-014W2, PDS2015-RP-15-001

Dear Jim Bennett,

I have read the Notice of Preparation regarding the sand mining proposal for El Monte Valley and there are several things that I feel need to be addressed before this project can be permitted by San Diego County. In my view the issues are so detrimental to the environment and human health that they cannot be mitigated.

In the NOP, it is stated that they will use one method to mine to within 5 feet of the water table, then continue to mine to the full 90 feet using another method. This indicates that they expect to get into the water table which leads me to believe that the underground flow of the San Diego river would be interrupted at this point and flow into the mining pit. I'm not a hydrologist, but it seems to me that here would be several undesired results. Please address these issues in the EIR.

1. The underground flow from upstream would no longer be restricted by the sand that it flows and filters through, so it would all drain freely out of the ground into the mining pit. This would drastically drop the water table for the entire valley upstream. It would cause wells to run dry and the beautiful old native oak trees' roots would no longer reach the water table. There would be no effective mitigation for the oak trees and the other natural flora growing in the river bed. Once they die from water deprivation, then the birds and other wild life that rely on them for cover would leave the area. The biodiversity of the area is vast and can't be restored in a few years, it takes hundreds of years to develop.
2. Mitigation for the wells would be costly, but would be necessary, since we all rely on our wells. They indicate that there would be no need for extension of water or sewer systems into the valley, but what will we use for water if they don't pay for the infrastructure to get water to our houses? There would need to be an EIR for that alone, since it would tear up land all over the valley. And are they going to reimburse us for the tens of thousands of dollars that are invested in each homeowner's existing wells, pumps, tanks, etc?
3. What will happen downstream? The water that flows out of the mine pit and continues downstream to the communities beyond will not have the advantage of the sand filtration, since it will all have been mined out. This water will carry mining waste and agricultural contamination downstream.

While we are on the topic of water, one of the mitigations that was suggested to subdue the Valley Fever threat was that they would keep the dust from blowing by spraying water over the mined areas. This would have to be a constant process since the wind blows almost non-stop in El Monte Valley. This would use a huge amount of water to be effective, 132 acre feet per year according to the NOP. This will also draw down the water table and have the effects mentioned above on the human life and flora and fauna living in the valley. In addition, the processing plant will apparently use water to wash the sand and remove the undesired "wash fines". A further demand on our limited ground water. Our wells are already low during this on-going drought. Using up so much precious water to get at sand that can be imported from elsewhere less affected by drought seems wrong. Please address the use of this finite resource in the EIR.

Speaking of Valley Fever, there are known cases of this disease in El Monte Valley. Some cases occurred after the 2003 fire, and at least one Helix Water District employee was stricken with it many years ago, I can get his name if need be. In addition, there would be the threat of silicosis, which I understand can be mitigated for mining workers by providing respiratory protection, but would be hard to mitigate for the residents of Lakeside when the silica dust becomes airborne. Please address both of these threats to human health in the EIR. The wind in El Monte Valley blows up the valley most of the time, but there are significant wind events that blow down toward Lakeside where the entire

population including school children would be at risk. Both of these diseases are debilitating and have life-long effects on the victims.

Another concern is that they will be depositing the wash fines (silt and clay) into the existing depressions (golf course ponds) and using it to build the "benches". What will keep this dry silt from kicking up in the wind? They can't spray it down forever. They mention that they will apply a "top dressing" and native seed mix to the wash fines that make up the benches in order to restore the lost vegetation. Anyone with gardening experience knows that silt and clay are not conducive to plant growth. If that is what you have in your yard, you are well advised to dig in large quantities of organic material to a goodly depth in order to allow air space for the roots and for proper drainage. You can't just put down a top dressing and plant seeds. Native plants are particularly sensitive to lack of drainage. They will not grow in clay and fine silt. The native soil is a combination of all sizes of rock and grit and it is rich in organic material. The native plants send their roots deep so they can survive dry conditions. If they do grow roots down into the silt and clay, they will drown when conditions are rainy and wet because clay and silt soil does not drain the way native soils do, rather it holds the water. Southern California native plants are adapted to living in native soil and will not thrive in fine silt and clay. This form of restoration is not permanent, the plants will die and the dust will blow. Please address these concerns regarding their proposed restoration in the EIR.

Traffic is a human health and safety risk that will affect all the people of Lakeside. I think they said hundreds of trucks per day would be passing in and out of Lakeside to reach the sand mine. This will snarl traffic at Maplevue and Hwy 67, where the intersection is already overwhelmed with high school traffic and traffic passing through the area to the Barona Casino. Since sales of sand will continue even on Saturday, there will be an impact on recreational use of El Monte Rd, from bicyclists and motorists enjoying the view, to all the boaters headed to El Capitan Reservoir. This should be studied in the EIR.

And speaking of the views ... San Diego County has designated El Monte Rd as "scenic road" and the entire valley was designated a scenic corridor at some point because I remember seeing it on the maps of the area when we bought our home here in 2007. The county should have some responsibility to preserve the scenic quality of a scenic road. I can't really think of anything worse than a beautiful view of the valley with a sand mine in the foreground. I've been driving through Nevada recently and sand mines are not pretty! They have said they will build walls and put in trees, but that just isn't scenic, especially when the trees will never thrive in the wash fines they plan to plant them in. The EIR should examine this breach of County responsibility.

And then there is the potential for light pollution. El Monte Valley is one of the darkest areas in San Diego County this side of the mountains. A big industrial operation like a sand mine is bound to feel the need to "light up the night". There is already so much light pollution in San Diego County that most people don't even know what the Milky Way looks like. In El Monte Valley you can actually see the Milky Way, and that is one measure of darkness. The International Dark Sky Assn would be a good place to start to learn more about light pollution. This should be addressed in the EIR.

And noise pollution: the mental health issues ... please examine this in the EIR. During the construction of the PowerLink project the constant noise of the heavy lift helicopters running up and down the valley was truly depressing. The relief felt when they shut down operations at the end of the day was huge. This mining operation will contribute even more noise because of the truck traffic and the rock crushing. Please examine this issue in the EIR.

To conclude, I have to say that this beautiful valley with its rural residential and agricultural uses just doesn't seem like an appropriate place to locate a huge industrial sand mining plant. The El Monte Valley is a resource for all of San Diego County ... equestrians, boaters, picnickers, motorists, bicyclists, hikers, glider pilots, and others from all over the county enjoy this beautiful place. The dairy farm has a program bringing school children from all over the County to learn about where their food comes from ... who would bring those kids out here if there is a threat of lung diseases? Where else can all those city kids learn about cows and milk, and how things grow? We have so few truly natural places left in the County, it is no wonder that people flock here to enjoy the views. The valley would be spoiled irrevocably by a sand mine no matter how much restoration they do.

Thank you for your consideration,
Rose Masters
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