

EL MONTE SAND MINE AND NATURE PRESERVE

PDS2015-MUP-98-014W2, PDS2015-RP-15-001

September 9, 2015

Attn: Jim Bennett

I am writing to express my concerns about the El Monte Sand Mining and Nature Preserve Project. The name itself is extremely misleading. This is a proposal for a Sand Mine which will destroy, not preserve, the El Monte Valley.

I am a resident of Lakeside, not the El Monte Valley. We moved here in 1973 seeking a more rural lifestyle, where we could keep our horses on our property and have easy access to trails and open space. Today the El Monte Valley is the only remaining area of our community to have escaped housing development and runaway industrial use and abuse. The sandy alluvial riverbed of the San Diego River has long been eyed by the sand mining interests and by the powerful and well-funded construction industry which is well represented on Planning Boards throughout the county. The mining and construction interests argue that there is dire need for high quality sand and local sand would help reduce the costs and pollution caused by importing sand. This plan has been on the books for some time, (first thinly disguised as a plan for golf courses). They can acquire the land for a relatively low cost and after removing billions of dollars of sand over at least a 15 year period which will make them very rich to the detriment of the valley itself, the residents of the valley, the Lakeside area in general and the people of San Diego County. They plan to "restore" the valley in a way that nature never intended.

The proposed mining site is atop the Santee/El Monte Aquifer, the third largest aquifer in San Diego County. This aquifer formed thousands of years ago by water seeping through the sand which served to filter out impurities. Today, in a time of overpopulation, climate change, and cyclical drought, we need to preserve our precious groundwater. The sand mine proposal includes drilling additional wells, drawing on the aquifer to keep down dust. It would become the biggest water user in the valley. The wells of the valley's residents could go dry or become contaminated and unusable. The sand mine will create a huge, deep pit a hundred feet deep and involve 190 acres. Eventually, when sand mining is terminated 15 -20 years in the future, they propose to fill this cavity with mining waste and water to create an artificial lake. This would damage the purifying effect of the aquifer and open it to pollution. They plan to create an artificial environment and then reintroduce native wildlife and plants. The City of San Diego owns the water rights to this land and it remains to be seen what their position will be but one would hope they want to protect their groundwater interests.

In addition to the water, I am also concerned about the additional truck traffic that would be created. El Monte Road is a narrow, two lane road that has been designated a Scenic Corridor in the County's General Plan. The road leads past a dairy and several equestrian facilities as well as the County of San Diego owned El Monte Park. The road continues on to provide access to the El Capitan Reservoir. The two lane road is popular with cyclists, boaters hauling watercraft, and people trailering horses to ranches in the valley or recreational riding on trails. The truck traffic would interrupt the serene

atmosphere of the valley and present a safety hazard to travelers. El Monte Road empties onto Lake Jennings/Mapleview Road. This is already heavily traveled, especially since Highways 67 and 52 were connected. There is presently back up during the morning commute hours and it continues onto Highway 67 in both directions. In addition, the traffic would impact students arriving and leaving El Capitan High School. There are already many complaints about the long waits at the stoplights at Mapleview and Highway 67. In the mornings northbound traffic on 67 comes to a stop around Winter Gardens and in the afternoons, traffic begins to back up around 3:00 PM at Posthill Road and Highway 67. This causes many motorists to turn at Posthill and travel through residential Eucalyptus Hills, returning to the freeway at Riverford Road. The rest of the day there is a nonstop parade of construction equipment and gravel trucks traveling Highway 67. A through study needs to be done of travel conditions and CALTRANS should be asked what improvements, if any, are planned for the future.

Air quality in the Lakeside/Santee area is another concern. Sand mines are dusty neighbors. The dust created adds particulates to the air. Sand dust is abrasive and research indicates silicates can damage lung tissue. As a Lakeside resident, every automobile I have owned has had its paint damaged by sand so who knows what it has been doing to our lungs? Another very serious threat is Valley Fever which is caused by a microbe known to exist in El Monte sand. Many local residents have suffered the effects of Valley Fever. It sometimes causes death and is known to cause lifelong and recurring illness. This could endanger residents, sand miners, and it could be carried by sand hauled from the El Monte Valley. Additional research should be done before any decision is reached.

The people proposing the mine paint a picture of this part of the valley as a wasteland with very little biodiversity and this is absolutely not true. There is a wide diversity of plant and animal life here which would be destroyed or need to be relocated. The area is definitely in need of restoration, mainly because of previous sand mining efforts, most by the same group proposing the sand mine. There are invasive plants that need to be removed and holes that need to be filled. Much of the native habitat was bulldozed away and never restored even though the group was sued by Helix Water District for their failure to do so. Why should anyone trust this same group to ever follow through with their plan to restore the environment?

There is already a vision for the area. Lakeside's River Park Conservancy and the San Diego River Conservancy have hoped for many years to restore the San Diego River and establish a network of trails and parks from the headwaters to the ocean. The El Monte Valley is an essential part of this plan. This vision is now within reach if the land can be acquired from the Helix Water District. This beautiful area would be preserved for all to appreciate and enjoy and would involve no damage to the environment. Work could begin in the near future and would ensure the preservation of this priceless resource for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Sincerely,

Susan Muir Hanna Flynn

