

# Draft environmental report points to smaller mine in Temecula area

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By JEFF HORSEMAN  
The Press-Enterprise

A gravel quarry planned for the Temecula-area foothills would have "significant and unavoidable" effects on air quality and traffic, but not building the quarry would still lead to pollution and truck-filled roads, according to an environmental study released Monday.

Two feet thick and 6,800 pages in all, the draft environmental impact report on Liberty Quarry finds that a smaller version of the mine than proposed would be better than no mine at all, since emission-spewing trucks currently have to travel long distances to bring in the materials the mine would produce.

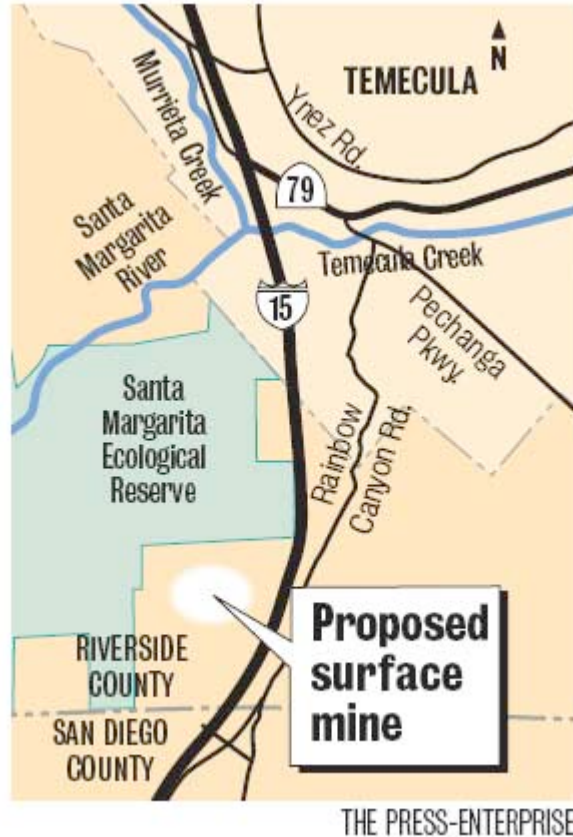
The quarry's developer, Granite Construction, hailed the report as proof the quarry will be a good neighbor.

The report "found that the region will be better off with the quarry than without it and that virtually every impact can be mitigated," read a Granite news release.

Temecula officials declined to comment.

The draft report -- which was at least three years in the making -- is a major step in the process to seek approval for the quarry. After a period of public comment, Riverside County planners will issue a final report, which will ultimately go to the Board of Supervisors.

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Monday's report is also certain to add fuel to the ongoing debate over whether the county should allow Granite Construction to build the mine, where 5 million tons of pebble-sized aggregate -- a key ingredient in concrete -- would be mined each year.

Granite Construction and other supporters contend Liberty Quarry will provide high-paying jobs, millions in tax revenue and a vitally needed building material.

Critics, including Temecula city leaders, say the quarry will ruin the quality of life in the area by emitting hazardous dust, clogging local roads with trucks and harming a wildlife corridor and a nearby ecological reserve.

Granite paid consultants chosen by the county to write the report. The document has been reviewed and approved by county planning staff through a state-mandated process. Since 2005, Granite has paid \$445,000 to the county related to the quarry.

Granite wants to build Liberty Quarry on a 414-acre site southwest of Temecula next to the San Diego County line. The mine would take up 155 acres, leaving room for making asphalt and concrete.

## **POTENTIAL EFFECTS**

The report, prepared by Lilburn Corp. of San Bernardino, concluded that Liberty Quarry would have little to no effect when it comes to the area's aesthetics, light pollution, water quality and wildlife, according to its executive summary.

With the exception of traffic in Temecula, the report found the quarry would have a "less than significant" effect on the nearby communities of Temecula, De Luz, Fallbrook and Rainbow or the adjacent Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve. The quarry's effect on Temecula traffic could be mitigated with the approval of the city and other jurisdictions, the report read.

But even after mitigation measures are in place, quarry operations have the potential to exceed air-quality thresholds set by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the report found.

Gary Johnson, Granite Construction's aggregate resource development manager, said in a phone interview Monday that while the report uses words like "significant" and "unavoidable" to describe potential air-quality and traffic problems, "It doesn't mean we're violating any ambient air-quality standards."

In an earlier e-mail, Johnson wrote that the report does not give a credit for trucks that would be taken off the road because aggregate wouldn't have to be hauled in from elsewhere. Granite executives have said this would improve overall air quality -- although quarry critics dispute that.

As for traffic, Johnson wrote that Granite would pay more than \$3.1 million in fees to help fund road improvements. But the report could not take those potential improvements into account when evaluating traffic, he said.

## **ALTERNATIVES STUDIED**

The report looked at alternatives to Liberty Quarry, such as not building the project, building it near Winchester or reducing its size.

Not building the quarry would mean "the likelihood of increased air emissions and traffic that would result from the continued need to supply the market area" with aggregate from elsewhere, the report read.

The report made no recommendations, but said that of the alternatives studied, the best would be to allow a smaller version of Liberty Quarry. Shrinking the quarry footprint by 20 acres would lower the amount of mineable aggregate by 12 percent while lessening environmental impacts, the report states.

Company and state officials have said Southern California needs more aggregate to keep pace with its infrastructure needs.

Temecula Mayor Maryann Edwards declined to comment on the report, saying she had not had a chance to review it. City Planner Patrick Richardson also declined to comment, but said the city would likely submit comments about the report to the county.

Last month, the city tried unsuccessfully to annex nearly 5,000 acres, including the quarry property. The city wanted to ban open-pit mining at the quarry site.

The city commissioned its own environmental impact report in support of its annexation bid. That report warned that surface mining could have dire effects on air quality, traffic and wildlife.

Clif Hewlett, a member of the anti-quarry group Save Our Southwest Hills, said the group will review the county report thoroughly.

"As we've said a lot of times, we recognize we need (aggregate)," he said. "But the good thing (is), there's a lot of rock around a lot of places. And that location is just the wrong place."

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### **Liberty Quarry Report**

**COPIES:** The 6,800-page draft environmental impact report for Liberty Quarry is available on the county Planning Department Web site, [www.tlma.co.riverside.ca.us](http://www.tlma.co.riverside.ca.us). Hard copies and CDs are available at the following locations:

Planning Department offices, 4080 Lemon St., Riverside

City of Riverside Main Library, 3581 Mission Inn Ave.

UCR's Tomas Rivera Library, 950 University Ave., Riverside

Temecula Public Library, 30600 Pauba Road

Grace Mellman Community Library, 41000 County Center Drive, Temecula

Murrieta Public Library, 8 Town Square

Fallbrook Branch of the San Diego County libraries, 124 S. Mission Road

**What's next:** Riverside County will accept public comments on the report until 5 p.m. Sept. 18. Comments can be e-mailed to [libertyquarry@rctlma.org](mailto:libertyquarry@rctlma.org). The county must address those comments as part of the report's final draft. After that, the quarry proposal will go to the county Planning Commission before heading to the Board of Supervisors for a final decision.

[http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE\\_News\\_Local\\_S\\_quarry21.45681c0.html](http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE_News_Local_S_quarry21.45681c0.html)

Comments (3)

[totalrecall](#) 14 minutes ago wrote:



Actually, the quarry is in Bob Busters district, but still, we have been let down by many of our elected officials, who are tied to developer Dan Stephenson and Rancon. A quote from the story says it all: " Temecula officials declined to comment." Temecula Mayor pro-tem Jeff Comerchero; President of Rancon; Council member Mike Naggar, major consultant for Rancon; Temecula Mayor Maryann Edwards, Vice-President of Mission Oaks Bank, major bank roller of many Rancon Projects; Temecula Council member Chuck Washington; a major investor in Europa, a Rancon development; Temecula council member Ron Roberts; his son works for Rancon, and he also is an administrative assistant(paid) for Supervisor Jeff Stone. Supervisor Jeff Stone, client of Rancon and benefactor of major real estate deals involving Rancon. The Temecula Theater Foundation, run by Beverly and Dan Stephenson (founder of Rancon) have promoted Liberty Quarry at Temecula Theater foundation events. These elected officials have let down their constituents. If the quarry comes in, against the will of almost every intelligent voter in the area, these elected officials will be the reason why. The quarry needs to be put to a vote of the people, not the conflicted interests of our elected officials.

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[Joe in Hemet](#) 2 hours ago wrote:



Just put it there.

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[Reality Check](#) 2 hours ago wrote:



With a Stupervisor and Sister like the Stones representing the turd District: is there any doubt the quarry is going to get approved?