

# Plans surface for another Kings River gravel mine near Sanger

 [fresnobee.com/2014/07/28/4044863/plans-for-another-kings-river.html](http://fresnobee.com/2014/07/28/4044863/plans-for-another-kings-river.html)

By Marc Benjamin

Farming grapes, olives and walnuts southeast of Sanger isn't enough for Herb Lang. Soon he hopes to farm rocks.

He treads over his olive orchards, plucking out smooth oval rocks that stick out of the sandy dirt next to the Kings River as he talks about plans for gravel mining on 833 of the 2,000 acres that is Running Luck Ranch.

"We are in the farming business," Lang said. "We want to recover the resource and get back to farming as soon as possible."

But nothing goes quickly when it comes to plans for gravel mining in the region. The area already is home to several operations.

Lang's project would be west and north of the Calaveras Material gravel project, which is south of Riverbend and Goodfellow avenues, and south of the Santa Fe Aggregates site at Annadale and Riverbend avenues. Santa Fe is south and west of Vulcan Materials, which is south of Highway 180 along the Kings River and north of Annadale.

The Carmelita mine plan, approved last year by Fresno County supervisors, is north and west of Goodfellow and Reed avenues, about two miles east of the Calaveras plant. Carmelita is on hold until lawsuits are settled.

Like Carmelita, Lang's proposal has opponents from Kings River preservation groups, Native Americans whose ancestors once lived on the farmland and neighbors concerned about noise, traffic and other potential effects of gravel mining.

A meeting is scheduled Wednesday at Sanger High School to give the public an opportunity to comment on the [draft environmental impact report](#) for Lang's gravel mining project. Comments will be answered in the final environmental document. The Fresno County Planning Commission will vote on the project early next year.

The project proposes to produce 1.25 million tons of rock yearly over 75 years. Of the 833 acres, 619 will be used for mining with the rest remaining in farming and riparian habitat.

John Buada, Lang's project consultant, said the gravel would be mined about 40 acres at a time over five-year periods. During the mining, Lang will farm the remainder of the ranch.

About 268 mined acres will return to farming -- dirt from the farm will be removed and stored during mining and then returned -- and 351 acres will convert into ponds and riparian habitat with native vegetation as the project moves through its lifespan.

A cement plant will occupy 59 acres north and west of the Goodfellow and Riverbend avenues intersection, according to the plans.

Lang said he has no plans to move his home and office, which overlooks much of the area where the gravel mining will occur.

"This has to work and be compatible with the farming operations and the habitat that's there," he said.

### **Heavy demand**

If approved, Riverbend Sand and Gravel will help meet demands for Fresno-area construction for the next 50 years.

The state Department of Conservation's geological survey shows the Fresno market area is short by about 50% for its 50-year demand. With Lang's project, the market area shortfall will be cut to 33%, the draft environmental impact report states.

The state's 2012 report, which examined permitted gravel projects at the start of 2011, says the Fresno market area, which includes Madera County, has 10 years or less in aggregate reserves.

The state report also says that the Fresno market's ability to meet the 50-year aggregate demand fell 31%, from 629 million tons to 435 million tons, since 2006.

That was before approval of the Carmelita project, which is projected to mine the same amount as Riverbend, according to environmental documents.

The state views the Kings River as a site of regional significance for aggregate and gravel, Buada said.

Riverbend will employ about three dozen workers, in addition to truckers, and generate spinoff jobs in construction, he said.

The rock and aggregate will be used for more than streets and highways, said Michael Prandini, president and chief executive officer for the Fresno-Madera Building Industry Association.

"That supply is critical to the homebuilding industry as well as commercial and industrial builders," he said. "It's a very important ingredient in construction."

The cost for hauling heavy rock is a problem. The more distant the source, the more diesel emissions go into the air, the higher the cost for the rock and more wear and tear on roads, Prandini said.

The Riverbend environmental document says traffic, road wear and pollution would all be worse if rock products had to travel greater distances.

Noise is viewed as a "significant and unavoidable" issue for the project, according to the environmental document.

The project would address some noise concerns with the addition of trees and berms and would screen visible mining activity with trees along property lines, Lang and Buada said.

### **Too much too soon**

Opponents say there are too many gravel mines sprouting up along the Kings River basin and no means of containing them.

Lang's neighbor is John Gray, a Reedley veterinarian who has opposed other local gravel projects in recent years. Gray is concerned that an environmental report examining the cumulative effects of all the gravel mines on the Kings River never has been prepared.

"When it's all built out it will change the whole complexion of the area that we live in," he said. "The county has never looked at this as a cumulative effect, it's always been pieced in ... The state says we need the gravel, but we want to know at what cost."

Native Americans also oppose Lang's plan. The Traditional Choinumni Tribe, which was among the groups that led opposition to the Jesse Morrow Mountain gravel mine that county supervisors rejected in 2012, are concerned that the Riverbend plan will disturb archaeological resources in an area where Choinumni ancestors lived.

Tribal chairman David Alvarez described the Running Luck Ranch area as an old Indian village site.

"We feel they are going to unearth a lot of artifacts and remains as they start stripping sections," he said. "The whole area along the river is very sensitive."

Buada said a chunk of land next to the river was removed from the mining plan because artifacts were discovered.

When work gets underway, a cultural and paleontological consultant will be hired to educate workers so they are aware of potentially sensitive archaeological resources, Buada said.

Kent Kinney, secretary of El Rio Reyes Conservation Trust, which filed legal action against the Carmelita Mine project, said Riverbend should be set farther back from the river than is planned.

A project alternative in the environmental document suggests mining 100 or 150 feet from the river instead of 50.

He says the long-term effects of so many mines in such close proximity is not known.

"Fresno County has to decide what the balance is," he said. "There is a point at which gravel mining should be limited in order to conserve farmland and natural resources ... that should be in an approved county plan before gravel mines continue to be considered."

El Rio Reyes Trust, Kinney said, wants to conserve the natural setting that remains.

"We must establish what our true values are, because we are making decisions now that can never be reversed," he said.

### **If you go**

- What: Public hearing on Riverbend Sand and Gravel Project
- When: 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday
- Where: Sanger High School (multi-purpose room), 1045 Bethel Ave.

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6166,  
[mbrbenjamin@fresnobee.com](mailto:mbrbenjamin@fresnobee.com) or @beebenjamin on Twitter.

