

Fresno County to hear appeal Tuesday over mining project near Sanger

By Marc Benjamin
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Fresno County supervisors will hear an appeal Tuesday to the Fresno County Planning Commission's approval of a 619-acre gravel project east of Sanger.

The commission approved the project by a 5-1 vote in February, but it was appealed to the Board of Supervisors.

The mining project on Running Luck Ranch is near Riverbend and Goodfellow avenues. It includes 351 acres of farmland reclamation to replace an equal portion of land that will be taken out of agricultural production, said John Buada, who represents Riverbend Sand and Gravel.

The project is proposed in phases over a 75-year period. The other 268 acres will revert to agriculture as those phases are completed.

As a response to concerns about noise, Buada said, his clients will raise the height of a berm and add more noise-suppression equipment. He said trees also will get planted on top of the berm to further reduce noise and viewing of the gravel project.

There also will be periodic noise testing to ensure the berms are functioning to buffer sound from the mine and gravel plant, he said.

Buada, who has been a consultant on several Kings River and San Joaquin River gravel mining projects, said the Riverbend project has had fewer critics than those he has been involved with in the past.

"About 10 spoke at the planning commission and there were about two dozen there to oppose it," he said.

There were 30-35 comments received by county officials compared with between 100 and 200 for other local gravel mining plans, he said.

Those opposing the project cited potential traffic, water and noise issues.

Lauren Layne, lawyer for neighbors Steve and Diane Findley, said they are concerned about noise even with changes made to the berm.

She said the Findleys are worried about continued noise monitoring if noise exceeds levels in the county's ordinance. Layne said Riverbend Sand and Gravel officials did improve noise buffering. She said dust and traffic also are concerns.

"They would like the project not to be across from their home and their peaches," Layne said.

John Gray, also a nearby resident, said roads in the area will have difficulty handling the cumulative traffic from Riverbend Sand and Gravel and other nearby gravel mines.

"Roads are identified as serious issues, but they can't be resolved because Riverbend Sand and Gravel is only on the hook for its portion of improvement costs," Gray said.

David Cehrs, president of the El Rio Reyes Conservation Trust, said his group wants a larger buffer between the

mining work and the Kings River.

He said a larger buffer zone has been proposed by El Rio Reyes Trust for other projects, too, but also rejected by Fresno County supervisors.

“The project is in the river’s floodplain and any of these projects have the potential for the river to move its channel,” Cehrs said.

Noise, traffic and air quality were listed as three “significant unavoidable impacts” of the project, according to environmental documents.

The project is expected to produce 1.25 million tons of rock yearly and will help meet the Fresno-area’s construction demands.

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If you go

Fresno County Board of Supervisors meets at 9 a.m. Tuesday in the Fresno County Hall of Records at Tulare and M streets.