

"Austin Quarry"

Briefing Book

Prepared By

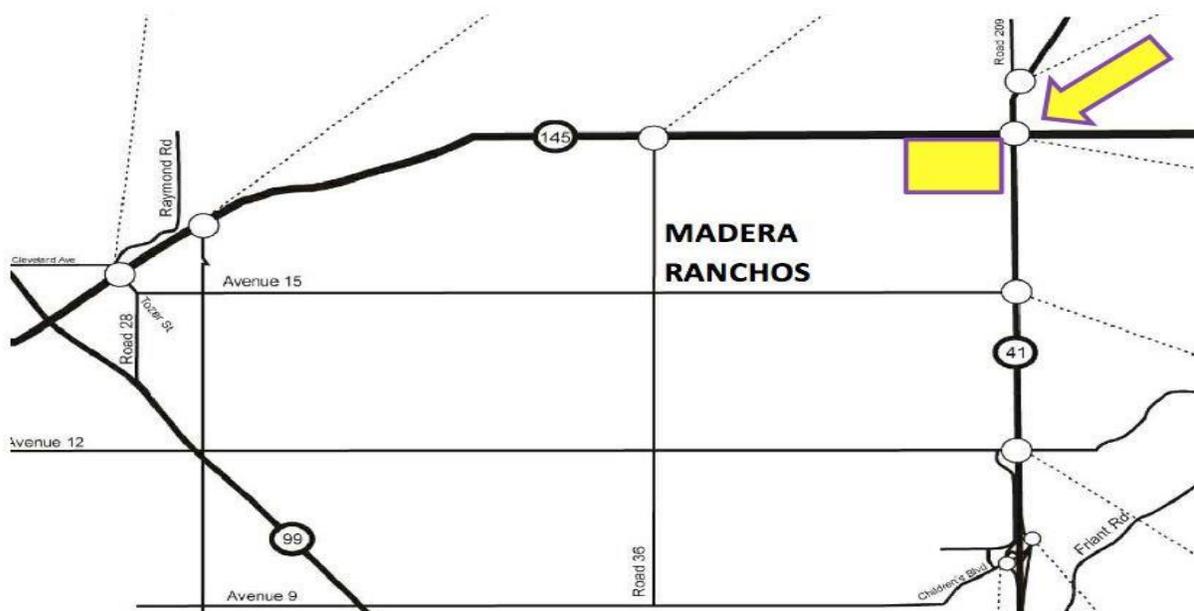
Madera Oversight Coalition

Version 1 ~ November 10, 2014

Introduction

This briefing book has been prepared to summarize the project and the issues it raises.

Vulcan Materials, the nation's largest producer of aggregate, proposes to open Madera County's largest quarry ever, just 3 miles east of Madera Ranchos near the intersection of Routes 41 and 145. This is a 100-year project that will last the lives of our children and grandchildren.



Environmental Impact Report

On October 21, 2014, Vulcan's consultant released the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report, a 700-page document with three volumes of appendices spanning almost 3,000 pages. In this document, known as the "EIR," Vulcan tells the story of the project using maps, charts and diagrams. Despite the seemingly scientific format, the EIR strategically avoids admitting to many of the impacts of the project. As is typical of such documents, the EIR is also completely silent on the economic consequences of the project, which would be enormous.

Project Highlights

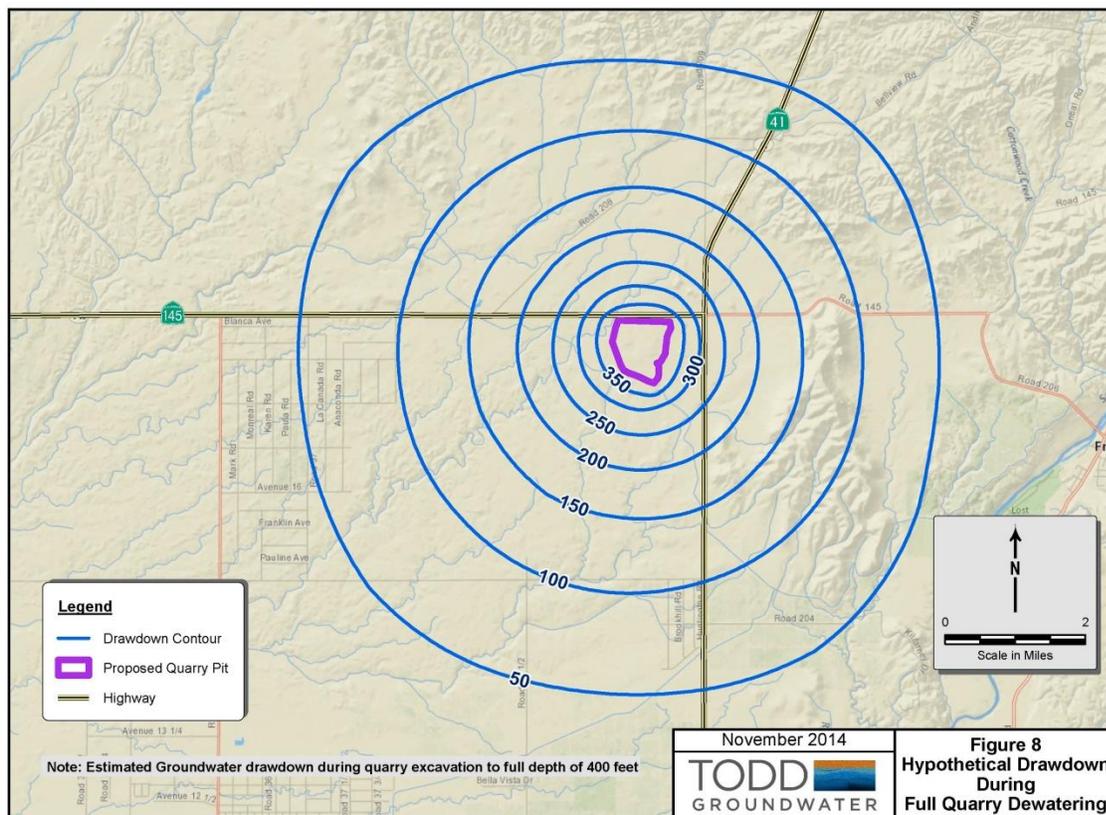
- ✓ Open 24/7. Permit allows operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, limited only by the operator's business demands.
- ✓ Lasts Forever. 100 year term means ten decades of impacts. Even after that, steep-walled quarry pit would not be filled in and would remain forever.
- ✓ Dries Out Our Wells. 258-acre, 400-foot deep quarry pit would drain up to 4,000 acre feet of water per year from the already over-drafted Madera Groundwater Basin causing well levels to drop for miles around, including in Madera Ranchos and Bonadelle Ranchos.
- ✓ Pours Trucks Onto Our Roads. Would dump 1784 new trucks each day onto Routes 41 and 145, degrading levels of service (LOS) throughout the local road system. Vulcan says it will pay "fair share" toward road improvements, but doesn't say where the rest of the money would come from or when.
- ✓ Wakes Up Our Neighbors. Many residences are along routes between the quarry and its customers. 18-wheelers will rumble by homes day and night.
- ✓ Pollutes Our Air. Increases ozone and other pollutants in an already-polluted region.
- ✓ Displaces New Residential Development. 348-acre site could be used for 1,000 homes. Other nearby property would be unsuitable for residences due to noise, fumes and dust from constant blasting and asphalt plant.
- ✓ Doesn't Create New Jobs. Generates only 15 to 40 jobs, and zero construction jobs, as contrasted with residential development that could generate thousands of construction jobs.
- ✓ Hurts Property Values. Reduces value of residential property within 5 miles by up to 20 percent.
- ✓ Doesn't Help the County Budget. Increased property tax to County is estimated at only \$128,000 per year, which is offset by huge losses in taxable value of nearby property and other economic losses to Madera County residents.

Issue # 1: Water

A new 400-foot deep, 258-acre hole blasted into our groundwater aquifer, drawing down wells for miles around.

What Does Vulcan Say? Vulcan says that the already over-drafted Madera Groundwater Basin would not be affected because the quarry is not connected to the basin, and offers a speculative program that would recharge the basin from storm water percolating into the quarry pit.

What's the Real Story? Independent hydrologist Iris Priestaf of Todd Groundwater (formerly Todd Engineers), which prepared Madera County's Groundwater Management Plan in 2002, says that the amount of water entering the pit could be as much as 4,000 acre feet per year, creating a depression that would affect wells within a 5-mile radius, including dozens of farmers and residents of Madera Ranchos and Bonadelle Ranchos.



For More Information: See Todd Groundwater, Evaluation of Potential Groundwater Impacts, Austin Quarry Project Madera County, November 3, 2014

Issue #2: Traffic

1784 new trucks dumped each day onto Routes 41 and 145, and more than 3 trucks per minute during the AM rush hour.¹

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR admits that the project would degrade levels of service (LOS) at most nearby intersections and on virtually all nearby road segments, in some cases to levels of service D or F.(EIR, pg. 3.11-29-3.11-33.)Vulcan admits that intersection improvements are necessary, yet the only ones it proposes to construct are at the entrance to the project itself. For all other needed improvements, Vulcan proposes only to pay its “fair share” toward the improvements, via County Road Impact Fees, a CalTrans fee and certain other nonspecific sharing methods. In fact, the EIR preparer implies that the County lacks the legal authority to require anything more than “fair-share” fees, stating that “The County cannot require the Project to fund improvements in a manner that is disproportionate to the Project impacts.” (EIR, pg. 3.11-46.) Yet, the EIR admits that this is not enough to truly mitigate the traffic impacts of the project:

“Notwithstanding the Project’s payment of its proportional share toward the necessary improvements, due to uncertainties with regard to the timing and ultimate installation of the required improvements, it cannot be determined with certainty that the improvements would be installed before the need for their benefits in accommodating regional and Project-related traffic. Further, in some instances as disclosed above, at certain locations there is no feasible set of improvements that would achieve acceptable levels of service under future conditions with or without the Project.”

EIR at pp. 3.11-47 to 3.11-48.

What’s the Real Story? The EIR treats the project as though it were a given, and that the County must accept something less than full mitigation for its impacts. However if, as Vulcan claims, the County is powerless to mitigate the impacts of the quarry, it can still avoid them by simply denying the project.

For More Information: See EIR, at pages 3.11-19 to 3.11-51.

¹ EIR at pg. 3.11-19 to 3.11-20 and Table 3.11-6.

Issue #3: Noise

Trucks rumbling through residential areas, day and night.

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR admits that truck traffic can disturb residential neighbors, and when the traffic is at night it can cause sleep disturbance. Yet the EIR insists that residential neighbors of the routes used by quarry trucks are either far enough away from the road, or else won't hear truck traffic as long as they keep their windows closed. (EIR at 3.10-32.) As for those residences where people use their windows for fresh air, the EIR says they are out of luck:

“Due to the number of potentially affected residences (all residences within 100 feet of any road that might be used by a project-related truck trip during the nighttime hours), mitigation options are limited and infeasible. It is not feasible to require residents along project haul routes to close their windows during night paving projects, and it is not feasible to identify and construct off-site noise barriers to reduce building façade noise exposure along all potentially traveled roadways. Furthermore, improvements to window assemblies or building façade construction would have little effect if windows are in the open position and noise impacts are not anticipated when windows are in the closed position. As a result, no feasible mitigation is available for this impact and the impact is considered significant and unavoidable for this EIR.” EIR, pg. 3.10-33

What's the Real Story? Windows open or not, there are numerous homes on Route 145 and Route 41 that are close enough to the road to be affected by noise from truck traffic. In addition, with over 10,000 trucks coming and going to the quarry each week from all directions, many hundreds of these trucks will surely stray from the obvious main routes and use roadways like Avenue 15, Road 29, Road 36 and Friant Road, where hundreds of residences and schools are directly adjacent to the roadway.

For More Information: See EIR, at pages 3.11-19 to 3.11-51; Dale La Forest & Associates, Austin Quarry Project, Findings and Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report, September 24, 2012.

Issue # 4: Air

More emissions in a polluted air basin

What Does Vulcan Say? Vulcan makes the standard concessions about worsened air quality from both quarry operations and truck traffic, given that existing conditions in the 8-county San Joaquin Valley Air Basin are already at “nonattainment” levels for numerous pollutants, including ozone and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). (EIR at pg. 3.3-6, Table 3.3-1.) On this basis, the EIR concedes that the project would have a significant and unavoidable impact on air quality. However, the EIR then proceeds to minimize the contribution of this particular project to the existing problem.

What’s the Real Story? The fact is, this large heavy industrial project and its associated blasting, asphalt plant and trucking would dramatically worsen air quality in the shared air basin – so much so that even the EIR concedes that ozone would be increased by .3% above “Peak Background Concentration” in the entire 8-county basin from just this single project. (EIR at pg. 3.3-63, Table 3.3-21.) In other words, if just 33 projects like this were adopted by the various counties that constitute the air basin, ozone in this already-saturated basin would increase by an astounding ten percent. In addition to this, many individuals living in residences along the trucking routes will be exposed to localized impacts from heavy-duty diesel truck emissions and traffic, especially along Route 145 and Route 41. The EIR doesn’t consider the effects on these “maximally exposed individuals,” known as MEIs.

For More Information: See Autumn Wind Associates, comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report, September 4, 2012.

Issue #5: Our Economy

Home values down 20 percent and no new jobs or tax revenue

What Does Vulcan Say? Not much. EIRs don't have to explain the economic pros and cons of the project, because they aren't generally considered to be "environmental" impacts.

What's the Real Story? Independent economist Dr. Gary Smith of Pomona College made the following conclusions about Austin Quarry:

- There is no compelling evidence of a shortage of aggregate in Madera County, so the assumption that the quarry will fill a need is faulty.
- The proposed quarry would not increase the amount of aggregate produced, but instead would merely shift production, jobs, and County revenue from other quarries in the County.
- The quarry would reduce property values within a 5-mile radius by up to 20%, for a total reduction between \$443 million and \$738 million.
- The reduction in property values within a 5-mile radius would reduce annual County property tax revenue by \$0.9 million to \$1.6 million.
- Increased travel times would cost residents between \$1.7 million and \$3.4 million each year.
- A quarry would generate only \$128,000 in property tax per year, compared to \$4.5 million per year if the site were developed with 1,000 residences.
- The quarry's net annual effect on the County budget would be a loss of between \$5.4 million and \$6.0 million, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars over the quarry's 100-year life.
- The quarry only needs 15 to 40 workers, and many of these would be specialized workers who would commute from outside Madera County.
- If the quarry site were to be developed as a residential subdivision, it would generate over 3,000 temporary construction jobs and dozens more long-term jobs for services such as gardeners and painters.

For More Information: See Gary Smith, Ph.D, Economic Costs and Benefits of the Proposed Austin Quarry in Madera County," October 23, 2014.