

## **Sunny Valley Gravel Pit Plan Draws Protests**

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By Jeff Duewel of the Daily Courier

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A plan to mine gravel near the community of Sunny Valley has drawn the ire of several residents of the area, who say it would create too much noise, cause unsafe driving on Placer Road and use too much water from Grave Creek.

Havilah Enterprises of Grants Pass two months ago submitted to Josephine County Planning a pre-application which outlines the proposal, said Roger Harada, senior planner.

It involves 10 to 12 pits with "several million" tons of potential aggregate near Grave Creek, on a 120-acre property 3.5 miles up Placer Road, just past King Mountain Trail, Harada said.

Roads have been built, and a site smoothed out for an aggregate processing plant, said Isaac Sanders, reclamationist for Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries who has visited the site and spoken to company officials Dave True and Jack Smith.

That work began months ago and has already created a stir in the community. One letter writer likened it to a Civil War re-enactment, and another warned a "peaceful way of life is in jeopardy."

The developers declined comment on the plan.

Aggregate, crucial to road and foundation building as a component of concrete, is in short supply and is difficult to mine in Josephine County, according to Copeland Companies, which has mined aggregate for half a century.

Havilah has not submitted a full application to operate, which would require approval from the Josephine County Planning Commission, and possibly from county commissioners.

Aggregate mining is a conditional-use allowed on the land, which is zoned Forest Commercial.

DOGAMI allows up to 5,000 cubic yards per year to be removed in exploratory work that requires no permit.

It also allows up to 5 acres of disturbance on a property in a lifetime without a permit, Sanders said.

"Any further expansion of mining related activities would trigger a permit requirement from us," Sanders said.

That hinges first on county approval. Harada said he has been overrun with email and phone calls

on the plan, even though an official land-use application has not been delivered.

"They have a year to submit the request. Aggregate mining is allowed as long as you can prove you meet the conditional-use requirements. That's going to be the big question."

The Oregon Water Resources and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife are two key agencies in the process. A significant amount of water would be required to reduce dust and wash gravel. Neighbors have already commented on fear of the effects on wells.

"Right now that's one of the big questions, because they don't have any water rights," Harada said.

Sanders said DOGAMI's permitting would rest solely on the odds of the land being reclaimed for its original use, after mining.

That could involve extensive shaping and filling with gravel and topsoil, tree planting and other water features, similar to what's happened over the hill at Golden along Coyote Creek.

Harada said the earliest any more mining could begin would be late this year.

"A lot of people are calling me saying it's a done deal," he said. "That's a misconception. The reality is, we're going to kick this to the planning commission, and there will be a public hearing.

"We're just sitting back waiting for them."

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