

## **Aggregate Mine Clears Planning Hurdle**

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By Jeff Duewel of the Daily Courier

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Josephine County's Rural Area Planning Commission voted unanimously Monday night to add about 200 acres in Sunny Valley to its significant aggregate inventory, the first step in Sunny Valley Sand and Gravel's bid to mine up to 6 million cubic yards of aggregate over 20 years.

A packed house at the Anne Basker Auditorium heard geologists debate the suitability of the deposit, then heard how the company would deal with noise, traffic, effects on water and other issues.

Backers of the plan were then given five minutes each.

"I'm right in the backyard of the property, and I was terrified when they first proposed it," said Dave Gaunt, a 41-year resident of Sunny Valley who lives adjacent to the proposed gravel mine on Placer Road. "But now I'm sold. It'll be some inconvenience, but it's for the good of the county."

Opponents ran out of time to be heard. As a result, the planning commission continued the hearing a week, to 6 p.m. on May 19 at Anne Basker, so opponents will have a chance to testify. Planning Director Dennis Lewis predicted there would be at least one more meeting, beyond the May 19 meeting, in the process.

The meeting opened with county Legal Counsel Steve Rich asserting that the planning commission should move forward despite questions from the opponents over ownership of mineral rights.

Geologists for opposition groups Rogue Advocates and Rogue Riverkeeper maintain that sampling of the site was insufficient and that the rock was mostly a debris flow and not primarily river gravel.

Project geologist Dorian Kuper estimated enough gravel existed to produce 6.9 million tons, far above the 500,000 needed to become a significant aggregate site. But Steve Rouse of the opposition said samples from only four of 17 trenches were analyzed, and to a limited depth.

Commissioners went with Kuper, by a 6-0 vote.

"Even if the aggregate was only 10 feet deep it would exceed the requirements by five times," said commission member Margaret Goodwin. "There's no reasonable doubt in my mind that it's a significant aggregate site."

In the meeting's second phase, county Public Works civil engineer Neil Burgess said Placer Road averages 628 trips a day and the gravel operation would put trucks on the road for an average of 55 trips and a peak of 85 trips per day. That means truck traffic would make up less than 10 percent of the road's traffic, on average.

Comparing this to some other roads in the county, Burgess said Foothill Boulevard has 5,000 vehicle trips per day with 14 percent truck traffic, while New Hope Road has 5,000 trips per day with 24 percent truck traffic.

Josephine County Watermaster Kathy Smith announced that the state Water Resources Department has not acted on applications for ponds and water rights, but officials in Salem told her they still have problems with the interaction with Grave Creek and groundwater.

Project hydrologist Gary Peterson countered with detailed analysis asserting that groundwater and Grave Creek flow would not be affected, and that only one well among the 40 residential properties inside the 1,500-foot impact zone would be affected. The company would pay for mitigation at that property, such as drilling a deeper well.

The project would also include a 25-foot-high earthen berm near the crushing operation to block noise from heading down the valley, and operate until only 5 p.m., five days a week.

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Reach reporter Jeff Duewel at 541-474-3720 or [jduewel@thedailycourier.com](mailto:jduewel@thedailycourier.com).