

Comment on Draft EIR  
Susan Heaton  
to:  
jdmckenzie  
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Show Details

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Mr. John McKenzie, County Planner  
  
County Government Center  
  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Dear Mr. McKenzie,

I am writing to comment on the DEIR for the Excelaron/Mankins project in Huasna Valley. I have some serious concerns over the fact that five Class 1 areas of significant impact were found in the DEIR. As you are aware, Class 1 impacts are considered significant, and for which no suitable mitigation can be found. As a long time resident of this beautiful, tranquil, pristine area, I see these impacts as making profound changes to the quality of life I have enjoyed here for many years. As such, I think the project as proposed by the Applicant should not proceed.

Among the five Class 1 impacts (significant, even with mitigation) is noise. The noise of drilling will be extensive and the number of holes to be drilled and the number of wells to be created still seems vague. Even after extensive reading of the DEIR I am still not sure whether there will be 12 wells drilled or 12 holes drilled. There is a difference, particularly in the Class1 impact areas of visual impact and noise. I did find on page 4.11-28 that "the full operation of the project could also include re-drills when all 12 wells are operating with pumping units and the proposed equipment at the Shipping Site." This paragraph goes on to talk about how the increase of the drilling noise would then exceed what has been proposed in the tables. This area needs to be clearly defined in the final EIR and the noise and visual impact it creates needs to be clearly specified.

Noise is virtually non-existent in Huasna Valley and the drilling and re-drilling of proposed oil wells will probably be heard all over this valley, due to our unique acoustic properties in this valley. As near as I could figure out from the virtually unintelligible section on Noise and Vibration is that it did not take into account some of the uniqueness of how sound travels throughout this valley. Indeed, one would have to live here for some time, to truly understand that. The DEIR does not address this and it needs to. County noise levels and thresholds have little meaning when applied to Huasna Valley and the DEIR does not consider all those aspects. It is part of our quality of life and it will be severely compromised with a noisy, visually intrusive industrial activity such as drilling for oil. The final EIR must fully acknowledge these aspects.

There are many references in the DEIR to the visual impact (Class 1), and the noise impact (also Class 1) which could be somewhat mitigated by a requirement that the drilling process only occur during the normal working hours of the project. That would be the 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. time frame on Monday through Friday and the limited work day on Saturday. I believe the final EIR needs to address those Class 1 impacts should the usual workday, and not a 24 hour workday, be implemented.

The use of "plans" as mitigation measures is another shortcoming of the DEIR. One such example exists in the Class 1 impact of air quality. There is a requirement for pressure sensors on the tanks as a mitigation measure.

Failure of equipment or upset conditions can not be prevented by a "plan" or a "mitigation measure". The DEIR clearly addresses that this impact cannot be fully mitigated. Even if such an event is unlikely, it is not worth the risk. The potential risks are many and that is why this project is so invasive to this natural area. Actually, the DEIR proves that is the case.

Additionally, there is an Oil Spill Prevention Plan. Again, this is not a mitigation. A plan, no matter how well conceived, does not prevent an oil spill. The DEIR needs to address serious mitigations that will work and if unable to do so, it needs to be realized that this plan is flawed, ill-conceived and totally inappropriate for this highly agricultural, rural area.

In reading through the DEIR, I located many places where the phrases "monitoring by the Applicant" occur. One example is table 8.4, Section BIO7.2, where the applicant is given the power to monitor the road on a monthly basis. Any area of the DEIR where the Applicant is to be the primary monitor is not acceptable. The final EIR needs to provide for independent monitors that the applicant pays for and who writes reports on findings that we, the citizens of Huasna Valley, have immediate access to. We will continue to protect our valley and our quality of life to whatever extent is possible, even with these invaders.

There are also many examples throughout the DEIR, where the word "should" is used. This is not acceptable. The word, "will" or "must" or "shall" needs to be used wherever the word "should" appears in the DEIR. The final EIR is a legally binding document and words like "should", protect no one; they are completely meaningless. It is the job and the obligation of the author of the EIR, the county and the Applicant to assure the citizens that the creator of the final EIR does not use subjective language, like the word "should".

The fact that the DEIR finds five Class 1 impacts indicates the level of unacceptability of this project. In reading the DEIR, one sees many flaws, some of which I have pointed out in this letter. I do hope you, Mr. McKenzie, will see to it that our concerns are heard and the final EIR represents a document that will protect our beautiful valley and our way of life, it is your obligation. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely Yours,

Susan L. Heaton