

1. Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been prepared to evaluate the environmental effects of the proposed Santa Margarita Quarry Expansion Project (Proposed Project, or Project). The Proposed Project involves the expansion of the existing Santa Margarita Quarry (quarry), located approximately three miles northeast of the community of Santa Margarita in the County of San Luis Obispo (County), as well as implementation of a proposed Reclamation Plan Amendment (RPA), as detailed in EIR Section 2 (Project Description).

1.1 Purpose and Intended Uses of the EIR

The County Department of Planning and Building is the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving the Proposed Project, and therefore is the Lead Agency for its review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq.), as defined in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15367 (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.). CEQA requires the Lead Agency to consider the information contained in an environmental review document, in this case an EIR, prior to taking any discretionary action. This EIR is intended to serve as an informational document to be considered by the County and other permitting agencies during their respective processing of the Proposed Project.

This EIR has been prepared to evaluate environmental impacts that may result from implementation of the Proposed Project. As the Lead Agency, the County has the authority to prepare this Draft EIR and, after its public and agency review, comment, and responses to comments process is complete, make decisions on the Proposed Project's discretionary actions and conditionally approve or deny its associated Conditional Use Permit (CUP). This EIR evaluates and mitigates the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Project's implementation. This EIR also identifies and evaluates the impacts of alternatives to the Proposed Project, discloses growth-inducing impacts, and identifies its energy-related consumption, significant and unavoidable effects, and irreversible environmental changes.

This EIR will serve as a project EIR pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15161 and 15168(a)(2). According to Section 15161 of the State CEQA Guidelines, a project EIR is appropriate for specific development projects in which information is available for all project phases, including planning, construction, and operation. This EIR provides project-level analysis for all aspects of the Proposed Project.

CEQA requires the Lead Agency to consider the information contained in an EIR prior to taking any discretionary action. The purpose of the public review of the EIR is to evaluate the adequacy of the environmental analysis in terms of compliance with CEQA. Section 15151 of the State CEQA Guidelines states the following regarding standards for which EIR adequacy is judged:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among experts. The courts have not looked for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

Under CEQA, “[t]he purpose of an environmental impact report is to identify the significant effects on the environment of a project, to identify alternatives to the proposed project, and to indicate the manner in which those significant effects can be mitigated or avoided” (CEQA Section 21002.19(a)). An EIR is the most comprehensive form of environmental documentation identified in CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, and provides the information needed to assess the environmental consequences of a proposed project. EIRs are intended to provide an objective, factually supported, full-disclosure analysis of the environmental consequences associated with a proposed project that has the potential to result in significant, adverse environmental impacts.

1.2 Permits and Agency Review

As reviewed in EIR Section 2.4 (Project History and Description of Existing Entitlements), the existing quarry has been in operation since the 1920s and those portions of it that were developed prior to enactment of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 are regarded as a vested mining right. The County recognizes the quarry’s pre-existing mining areas as vested, and accordingly, no use permit has been required for mining operations to continue in those areas.

Several other agencies will rely on information contained in this EIR to inform them in their decisions regarding issuance of specific permits or authorizations related to the Proposed Project. Responsible Agencies and other agencies with review authority over the Proposed Project include:

- California Department of Conservation, Office of Mine Reclamation (review and approval of the proposed RPA)
- State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Board (review and enforcement stormwater discharges and authority over any other water or waste discharges)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (review and agreement for any streambed alteration that may be required)
- California Department of Transportation (review and authority over any Project-related activity within a State owned transportation Right-of-Way [ROW])
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (review of potential discharges or effects on federal jurisdictional water or wetlands)
- County Air Pollution Control District (review of construction related emissions and authority over stationary point sources)
- County Department of Public Works (review and authority over any Project-related activity within a County owned transportation ROW, including encroachment permits and road maintenance agreements)

1.3 Reader’s Guide

As permitted in Section 15150 of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR may reference all or portions of another document that is either a matter of public record or is generally available to the public. Information from documents prepared for the Applicant that have been incorporated by reference into this EIR is noted in appropriate technical sections of this document.

Copies of these documents can be viewed, upon request, at the offices of the County Department of Planning and Building in the City of San Luis Obispo. They can also be accessed on the County’s Project-specific website at:

<http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/environmental/EnvironmentalNotices/hansonaggregate.htm>

In addition to the above, the County's General Plan, Ordinances, and other Zoning and Land Use Planning documents are available on the County's website at:

http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/General_Plan__Ordinances_and_Elements.htm

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15120(c), this EIR contains the information and analysis required by State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15122 through 15131. Each of the required elements is covered in one of the EIR sections or their related appendices, which are organized as follows:

- Executive Summary. Provides a description of the Proposed Project's environmental review process, a summary of the Proposed Project's attributes and its impacts, a brief description of the Proposed Project's alternatives and identification of the environmentally superior alternative, and a summary of the Proposed Project's areas of known controversy and issues in need of resolution.
- Section 1 (Introduction). Provides a discussion of the EIR's intended purpose, a summary of the Proposed Project's regulatory permitting requirements, and a description of the EIR's content.
- Section 2 (Project Description). Provides a detailed description of the Proposed Project.
- Section 3 (Environmental Setting). Provides a brief discussion of the existing quarry's history and operation, as well as a description of its overall environmental setting
- Section 4 (Environmental Analysis). Provides a comprehensive analysis and assessment of the Proposed Project's direct and indirect environmental effects. This section is divided into 14 subsections for each of 14 environmental issue areas addressed in this EIR. Each subsection contains detail regarding: (1) existing, or "baseline" conditions; (2) applicable County plans, policies and ordinances; (3) regulatory setting; (4) impact assessment methodology; and, (5) criterion-specific impacts and mitigation measures.
- Section 5 (Cumulative Effects). Provides a discussion of the cumulative scenario for the Proposed Project and its incremental contribution to cumulative impacts.
- Section 6 (Comparison of Alternatives). Provides a description of the alternatives evaluation process, as well as a description of alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis and the rationale thereof. This section also includes an analysis and assessment of impacts for the alternatives retained for analysis, including the No Project Alternative.
- Section 7 (Other CEQA Considerations) Provides a discussion of the Proposed Project's growth-inducing effects, energy consumption, significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided, and irreversible changes.
- Section 8 (References). Provides a listing of the documents and data used during preparation of this EIR.
- Section 9 (Preparers). Provides a listing of the individuals who prepared this EIR, and a listing of those individuals that reviewed it.
- Appendices: This EIR contains the following technical appendices:
 - Appendix A:
 - Notice of Preparation
 - Written Comment Letters

- Appendix B:
 - RPA Goals and Activities
 - Existing County Permit Conditions
- Appendix C:
 - Applicable Regulations for Biological Resources
- Appendix D:
 - Native American Consultation
- Appendix E:
 - Policy Consistency Analysis
- Appendix F:
 - Traffic Impact Analysis