

**SECTION 6.0
PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with CEQA procedures, an EIR must discuss reasonable alternatives to the proposed project. The State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a) states:

Alternatives to the Proposed Project. An EIR shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives.

Additional language in the CEQA Guidelines provides more direction for identifying a reasonable range of alternatives, including the ability to reduce impacts and feasibility. If the environmentally superior alternative is the “no project” alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.

The range of alternatives required in an EIR is governed by a “rule of reason” that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice. The alternatives shall be limited to ones that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. Of those alternatives, the EIR need examine in detail only the ones that the lead agency determines could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project. The range of feasible alternatives shall be selected and discussed in a manner to foster meaningful public participation and informed decision making.

6.2 BASIC PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The range of Alternatives presented in this Section relates to the project objectives for the Oster Quarry project. These basic objectives are presented in Section 1.0/Introduction and below, as follows:

- A. Develop significant mineral deposits in a manner that protects sensitive natural resources and existing adjacent uses, and is consistent with other County general plan goals and policies.
- B. Protect significant mineral resources from land uses that threaten their availability for future mining.
- C. Develop known concrete-grade aggregate reserves in the local production-consumption region in accordance with previous planning and coordination with California Department of Water Resources, state policy, the County EX1 Combining Designation and applicable regulations.

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- D. Provide an additional source of aggregate material in the region, with a permitted production of up to 500,000 tons/year for approximately 30 years, consistent with state policy, the County EX1 Combining Designation and applicable regulations, and in a manner that supports independent contractor and other local use.
- E. Contribute towards increased recycling of construction and demolition debris to help achieve an overall goal of 75 percent recycling for this type of waste material.
- F. Locate a concrete-grade aggregate quarry as near as practicable to use areas in the San Luis Obispo-Santa Barbara Production-Consumption region, and with minimal reliance on local streets to gain highway and freeway access.

6.3 SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

The alternatives presented in this section were identified in response to the significant unmitigable impacts identified for the proposed project, and presented in Section 4 of this EIR. These impacts are summarized as follows:

- **Impact AES-1: Scenic Vistas.** The project will create graded slopes into natural hillsides, which will be visible to the public from portions of the SR 58 corridor, which is identified for study as a scenic corridor by the Conservation and Open Space Element.
- **Impact AES-4: Cumulative Effects on Aesthetics and Visual Resources.** It is reasonable to expect that future quarries will be approved and constructed in the area surrounding the project. An unspecified number of these future quarries will have graded areas and ultimately revegetated slopes that will have adverse visual impacts similar to the proposed project, particularly when viewed from SR 58. However, the specific number and actual configuration of these future quarries is unknown at this time.
- **Impact AQ-1a Emissions of ROG+NO_x.** Operations at the quarry at the planned production rate of 500,000 tons per year would generate combined emissions of Reactive Organic Gases (ROG) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) in excess of the daily SLOAPCD thresholds defining a significant impact for these ozone precursors.
- **Impact AQ-1b: Emissions of PM₁₀ Fugitive Dust.** Operations at the quarry at a production rate of 500,000 tons per year would generate emissions of PM₁₀ fugitive dust in excess of the daily SLOAPCD thresholds defining a significant impact for this criteria pollutant. The fugitive dust emissions would not exceed the annual threshold.
- **Impact Noise-1: Truck Traffic Noise.** The project will generate additional truck traffic, which will increase Ldn values along SR 58 by up to 1.9 dBA, causing a potentially significant impact. In the relatively quiet neighborhood along J Street and Estrada Avenue this is considered a significant impact.
- **Impact NOISE-2: Quarry Operations Noise.** During early phases of the proposed quarry, including the initial construction and quarrying through the completion of Phases 1A and

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1B, it is likely that hourly Leq values caused by the quarry operations at some nearby residences will exceed the County daytime Leq standard of 50 dBA (or ambient plus 1 dBA).

- **Impact NOISE-3a:** Blasting Noise. During early phases of the proposed quarry blasting, Lmax values at nearby residences are predicted to range from 62 dBA to 80 dBA, depending on the prediction method used. Lmax values in excess of 70 dBA are considered a significant impact.
- **Impact NOISE-5:** Cumulative Traffic Noise. The project will add to future traffic noise along SR 58 through Santa Margarita. The cumulative Ldn values will exceed 65 dBA at the exterior of residential locations at the east and west ends of the Santa Margarita Rural Village.

From this list of significant impacts, the items most amenable to mitigation through the selection of an alternative location or design are the impacts related to aesthetics and noise, which depend on the relationship between the project site and nearby residents or travelers on roadways. Thus, the effort in considering project alternatives has been focused on locations or other measures capable of reducing the quarry effects on aesthetics and noise in its immediate vicinity.

6.4 CATEGORIES OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The main project alternatives are presented in four broad categories:

- No Project Alternative
- Alternative Locations for the Project: two existing quarries and seven alternative locations are reviewed
- Alternative Designs for the Project, which Preserve the Southern Ridgeline: two alternative access drives and a reduced quarry design are reviewed
- Alternative Access Route

The No Project Alternative discussion is required by CEQA; this Alternative would avoid the site-specific impacts (mainly aesthetics and blasting noise) associated with the project. As such, the No Project Alternative would be environmentally superior to the proposed project in the most basic analysis. According to the CEQA guidelines, at least one additional “environmentally superior” alternative needs to be identified.

In addition to expansion of the two existing quarries, certain alternative locations were chosen generally within the region of the proposed project – within the southern half of the La Panza granitic geological formation, as presented on Figure 6.4-1. More remote locations could have been considered, as well as locations in different geological formations; however,

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these remote locations would not match well with the intended market, in terms of transportation distances and product quality. One possible off-site region that could supply high quality gravel, crushed cobbles, and sand, is the river bed of the Salinas River or its larger tributaries. A number of such projects have been proposed in the County over the last decade. These projects along the Salinas River have their own environmental issues and controversies and, in any event, could not supply the volume of angular granitic rock best suited for use in asphaltic concrete pavement desired by the project applicant. For these reasons, alternative locations along the Salinas River were not considered for this project.

For the proposed project, different access routes and a reduced design are considered with the intent of keeping all or most of the southern quarry ridge intact as a visual shield to reduce the aesthetic impact of the project – principally on views experienced by travelers on SR 58.

At the end of the section, a table compares the relationship of each alternative to the major project objectives and its relative effect on the major environmental issues when compared to the project as proposed.

6.5 NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

With the implementation of a No Project Alternative, land use at the site would continue to be kept as predominantly naturally vegetated hillsides on the steep slopes of the property and limited grazing in the flatter areas. None of the environmental effects or impacts associated with the quarry development would occur. Specifically, the current views of the property from SR 58 and the nearby areas would remain, and there would be no increases in blasting noise levels or traffic. There would be no loss of biological habitat, and no permanent conservation measures placed on any part of the property.

The No Project Alternative would not fulfill the specific project objective related to producing 500,000 tons per year of aggregate material for use in the local development and road construction and maintenance sector. From a broader County perspective, this alternative would not help balance the regional production-consumption gap in aggregate resources discussed in Section 2.2.2 of this EIR. Production at other rock quarries in the region would continue and expansions or development of new quarry sites would be anticipated in response to market conditions and subject to appropriate County approvals.

Future uses on this property would be consistent with the Rural Lands designation, and would include continued agricultural use. It is possible that more intensive agricultural uses might occur in the pasture areas adjacent to SR 58, but this would not change the overall land use and appearance of the vicinity.

In summary, the No Project Alternative would avoid the significant aesthetic and blasting noise impacts and other effects of the proposed project and would be environmentally

superior in that respect. This Alternative, however would not achieve any of the project objectives.

6.6 ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS FOR THE PROJECT

In determining potential off-site locations the following considerations were taken into account:

- Located within or in close proximity to the Las Pilitas Planning Area
- Located within the EX1 – Extractive Resource Area Combing Designation
- Adequate size to support a quarry
- Proximity to an existing or feasible road able to support large trucks
- Free from significant land use restrictions
- Desirable attributes in contrast to the proposed quarry (i.e., better shielded from view by travelers on major roadways/highways, or fewer residents in the immediate vicinity)

The two existing quarries in the region meet the above criteria, and seven possible new alternative locations were determined to meet at least some of these criteria within the general vicinity.

None of these alternative sites are within the San Joaquin kit fox habitat area, nor are they within 10 miles of a recorded San Joaquin kit fox observation site (San Luis Obispo County: “San Joaquin Kit Fox Standard Mitigation Ratio Areas” map, December 2007). Furthermore, should kit fox habitat be found on any of these alternative sites, subsequent agency consultation, analysis and mitigation would be required, as generally outlined in a County publication entitled “A Guide to the San Luis Obispo County San Joaquin Kit Fox Mitigation Procedures for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).”

There are likely additional alternative off-site locations, but this discussion provides a reasonable range both in terms of potential benefits and disadvantages. Figure 6.6-1 shows an overview of the alternative locations considered, and Figures 6.6-2 and 6.6-3 show more detail for each location. In addition to the larger locations in Figure 6.6-1, three smaller “borrow pits” are shown. These are locations shown on the 1993 USGS Santa Margarita 7.5 minute topographic map, or visible on historic air photos as excavated sites. Only two of these previous borrow pits were clearly in granitic rock near the project site and both of these sites now have residential uses on them; so they were not investigated further for this EIR.

6.6.1 Expansion of Existing Quarries

It may be possible to expand the permitted operations at the existing Rocky Canyon Quarry or the Hanson Santa Margarita Quarry. When this Draft EIR was prepared (Fall 2012),

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representatives from the Hanson quarry had submitted an application to expand that quarry. Expansion of the existing quarries may be considered in conjunction with the No Project alternative at the Oster family property, and would thus avoid the impacts associated with this project. It may also be reasonable to consider expansion of existing quarries as a way of delaying the proposed project and its accompanying effects for some time.

Depending on project details, the operations at either the Rocky Canyon or Hanson Santa Margarita quarry may increase or continue for a longer duration in the absence of the proposed Oster/Las Pilitas Quarry. Since these operations already exist, their aesthetic effects have already occurred, but they may change somewhat over time. The traffic effects related to truck traffic through Santa Margarita or the southern portion of Atascadero to reach US Highway 101 would continue or perhaps increase slightly. In any event, since they already exist, the effects of these two quarries are already experienced by residents and drivers in the region and may be more acceptable for that reason.

Expanding the permitted operations at the existing quarries may be capable of meeting regional needs and may contribute in the long run towards correcting the production-consumption imbalance for aggregate resources. Neither quarry, however, would provide a local and independent source of aggregate material since both are owned and operated by large vertically integrated international corporations. Developing a new and independent source of aggregate is one of the specific objectives of the applicants for this project. If the proposed quarry is not developed, or if it is delayed, then the local aggregate market will continue its dependence on the existing quarries.

6.6.2 Alternative Location #1

Southwest Portion of El-Pomar Planning Area

Figure 6.6-2 shows the location of this alternative. The primary advantage of Alternative Location #1 would be its reduced impact on aesthetics and blasting noise. There are one or two residences relatively close to the northeast that would be affected by this location, but otherwise the surrounding areas are all vacant ranch land. The site would not be visible from SR 58 or any major highways, but it would be visible from SR 229 particularly for southbound travelers. This highway is narrow and carries a much smaller daily traffic volume than SR 58 near the project site.

There are several disadvantages to this site as well. Most notable is access to the site. There currently is not an access road that is viable for large vehicles on the site. An existing ranch road from SR 229 could provide access, but it would have to be upgraded and improved to accommodate large trucks. On SR 229, trucks would have to travel either northward through Creston to SR 41, or southward to SR 58. The northerly route would affect Creston, while the southerly route would necessitate travel on steep and winding sections of both SR 229 and SR 58, and would have effects in Santa Margarita identical to the proposed project. The

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impact to aesthetics would not be eliminated completely as a quarry at this location would be visible from SR 229 and from portions of Creston at a greater distance. Water sources have not been investigated for this location, but it is likely that a project here would have to rely on groundwater. Alternative Location #1 is outside of the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, and not near any major streams, so the water source for this location is not known.

Biological effects and mitigation measures and land use permitting restrictions are likely to be similar to those at the project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.3 Alternative Location #2

Northeast of the Proposed Project in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-2 shows the location of this alternative. The primary advantage of Alternative Location #2 would be its reduced impact on aesthetics and blasting noise to surrounding residents compared to the proposed project. This alternative may be visible from westbound SR 58, but it may be possible to conceal it almost completely behind an existing ridgeline.

The major disadvantage to this site is access. It would require a reinforced crossing over the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct and the construction of an intersection at SR 58 to provide adequate turning radius. From this point, trucks to and from the site would use SR 58 and would have to travel on one of its steep and winding segments. Traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be unchanged by this alternative. Water sources have not been determined but groundwater would be the likely source.

Biological and land use issues are likely to be similar to the proposed project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.4 Alternative Location #3

East of SR 229 and West of SR 58 in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-2 shows the location of this alternative. In one respect, this location would have a reduced impact on aesthetics, since it would be visible from fewer residences and may be slightly less visible from SR 58 than the proposed project. A ridgeline separates the location from SR 58, but eastbound traffic may have an oblique view towards quarry slopes about one-half mile distant at this location. For this reason, the visual impact of a quarry at this location may be somewhat less than that of the proposed project.

There are several disadvantages to this site. Access would be problematic as it would require either a new intersection with SR 58 or a new road crossing the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct to connect to SR 229; and trucks would have to travel the steep winding

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section of SR 58 to reach the site. Trucks would also use SR 58 through Santa Margarita, so traffic and noise impacts there would not be changed by this alternative. Although visual impacts would be reduced in regard to neighboring residents, the alternative would be visible from SR 58 and perhaps also from SR 229. The Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct crosses this land, and would require a significant buffer distance that would prevent access to much of the granite formation underlying the property. Biological considerations are likely to be similar to the project site. Water sources have not been determined but groundwater would be the likely source.

Other land use restrictions are likely to be similar to the proposed project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.5 Alternative Location #4

Southwest of SR 58 in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-2 shows the location of this alternative. Like Alternative Location #3, the only major advantage to this location would be visibility from fewer existing residents when compared to the proposed project. This location would also be less visible from SR 58 than the proposed project mainly because the segment of highway adjacent to Alternative Location #4 has many curves so any views into this alternative site would be fleeting.

There are several disadvantages to this site. It would be visible from SR 58 and it may be visible at the junction with SR 229 as well. Access is possible, but it would require road construction to connect it with SR 58. A large ridgeline may serve to separate this site from residences to the south along Parkhill Road, but the effectiveness of this barrier would depend on design. Traffic would be accommodated on SR 58, but the effects in Santa Margarita would be identical to those of the proposed project. Water sources have not been determined but the location is along Calf Canyon and shallow or deeper groundwater would likely be the source.

Biological and land use permitting requirements are likely to be similar to the proposed project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.6 Alternative Location #5

South of SR 58 and North of Parkhill Road in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-3 shows the location of this alternative. The primary advantage to Alternative Location #5 is its reduced visual impacts on SR 58 traffic, but it would have visual and traffic

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effects along Parkhill Road and to residents in that area. The traffic and noise effects along SR 58 and through Santa Margarita would be similar to those of the proposed project.

Any project here would have to rely on groundwater. Depending on location and depth, in dry years the potential water supply may not be sufficient.

Biological and land use permitting issues are likely to be similar to the proposed project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.7 Alternative Location #6

Eastern Area of Parkhill Road in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-3 shows the location of this alternative. This location is very isolated. Its major advantage is that a quarry operation here would be well removed from any residential uses. Aesthetic and noise effects would also be reduced, since the location is not visible from any major roadways and there are very few residences nearby. Trucks would use SR 58, so traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be similar to those from the project.

There are several disadvantages to this site. A new access road would have to be constructed into the property from Parkhill Road. The travel route to market areas would only be about three miles longer than for the proposed project, but that distance would be along Parkhill Road. Residents along this road would experience the additional truck traffic and attendant roadway noise levels.

Like Alternative Location #5, groundwater supplies in this area may be reduced in drought periods. Biological and other land use permitting issues at this location are expected to be similar to those at the proposed project site. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.6.8 Alternative Location #7

Seven Oaks Way in the Las Pilitas Planning Area

Figure 6.6-3 shows the location of this alternative. Like Alternative Location #6, this location is also very isolated but would require access to and use of Parkhill Road and Seven Oaks Way by heavy truck traffic. This alternative would avoid or reduce direct visual and blasting noise effects for residents near the proposed project site, but would affect other residents along Parkhill Road and in the Rural Lands along Seven Oaks Way. The traffic and noise effects through Santa Margarita would be unchanged.

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Water sources have not been determined but this region extends closer to the main drainage of the Salinas River. It is not riparian to the Salinas River, however, and not on a major creek, so this alternative would probably rely on groundwater from deeper fractured granite.

Biological and other land use permitting issues are likely to be similar to the proposed project site, but they have yet to be determined. Permission or willingness of landowner(s) to develop this site has not been determined.

6.7 ALTERNATIVE DESIGNS FOR THE PROJECT, WHICH PRESERVE THE SOUTHERN RIDGELINE

One of the significant adverse effects of the project as proposed is its visual impact as seen by travelers on SR 58 and from residences in the immediate vicinity and somewhat farther to the southwest along SR 58. Although the project would preserve two minor ridgelines on the west and east sides of the quarry to block views into the major part of its operations, it would remove the ridge connecting these two “shields,” exposing slopes during the Phase 1A portion of the mining, and higher but more distant slopes in the Phase 3A and 3B operations. Retention of this southern connecting ridge, or Phase 1A ridge, would provide a much larger visual and noise barrier to reduce the effects of quarry operations.

Figure 6.4-1 shows the general location of two alternate access routes that would retain the southerly ridge adjacent to the quarry. The following paragraphs provide a summary description and review of these two alternatives.

6.7.1 Western Access Drive Alternative

The access point on SR 58 for this alternative would be the same as that proposed for the project, but the access driveway would be routed along or adjacent to the existing farm roads through the property towards the west, and then northward around the end of the ridge at the southwest corner of the property and eastward into the main drainage of the proposed quarry. This approach would preserve the southern quarry ridge and would greatly reduce the visibility of cut slopes within the quarry itself from the south and southwest along SR 58. Very small exposures of cut slopes would still be visible from these areas, however, along the uppermost portions of the northern quarry ridge. As there would be less material to extract, the lifetime of the quarry would also be reduced.

This alternative would also reduce operational and blasting noise effects in the area. Effects related to truck traffic along SR 58 and through Santa Margarita, however, would be identical to those in the proposed project.

There are several disadvantages to this alternative; some related to environmental issues and others related to the property use. Along its eastern segment, the access road would have to be located north of the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct. This would necessitate cut

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and fill slopes that would be visible to the residences to the south and travelers on SR 58. Once the roadway departs from the alignment of the aqueduct, there may be more flexibility for its location but its design would have to balance competing issues. To minimize the visibility of cut slopes, the alignment could be placed towards the south closer to the Salinas River. While preferable for aesthetic reasons, this alignment would affect 10 to 20 more oak trees and would be closer to the riparian corridor of the Salinas River, about 200 feet to the south. Potential impacts to the river system would require appropriate drainage design to avoid the discharge of roadway pollutants to the surface water. If the Salinas River Trail is developed in this area, then the truck traffic would also affect users of the trail.

To avoid the potential impacts of roadway construction on the flatter areas closer to the river, the western access alternative could be designed farther to the north into the base of the hillside. If the route were to avoid extending onto the neighboring property to the west, it would also necessitate removal of a portion of the ridge at the southwest corner of the property, which is feasible for a quarry project that will be removing large masses of rock in any event.

Regardless of how the western access road is routed along the Salinas River, after it turns to the north and then to the east to reach the quarry site it will have an adverse effect on the main drainage associated with the quarry. This is an area with oak riparian and oak woodland habitat that would be conserved under the project as proposed. With this alternative, construction of the main access route would remove of an additional 10 to 20 oak trees adjacent to the bottom of the drainage. A larger number (50 to 70) of trees located on the north-facing slope in this drainage would remain preserved. A smaller drainage area to the northwest would not be affected by this alternative, or by the project as proposed.

The route would go across an existing corral and the ranch compound area, and would probably require moving one or more barns and storage buildings. The Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct also passes through this area so the access road carrying heavy trucks would have to avoid this large buried pipeline. Depending on how the design along the Salinas River is handled, this alternative may also extend on to the neighboring property to the west, requiring that owner's permission. While not environmental in nature, both of these conflicts may reduce the feasibility of this alternative.

Preservation of the southerly ridgeline in the quarry site under this alternative would greatly reduce the aesthetic impact of the project, but it would also reduce the volume of quarried rock by leaving that ridge in place. This would result in the loss of about 1,000,000 cubic yards of mineable material due to the exclusion of Phase 1A and 1B, or about 20 percent of the total proposed quarry material.

In summary, this western access alternative would reduce some aesthetic impacts, but it would have greater biological impacts, mainly due to road construction in the main drainage

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area of the quarry. This western access alternative would have more conflict with existing uses (ranch and California Aqueduct) and proposed uses (Salinas River Trail) than the project as designed. For this reason, the western access alternative is not considered environmentally superior to the proposed project.

6.7.2 Eastern Access Drive Alternative

The Oster family property extends another quarter-mile towards the northeast from the northeastern portion of the proposed quarry. From this far northeastern corner, the property is accessible via an existing service road at SR 58 and connecting system of ranch roads and trails. A re-design of the quarry using this eastern alternate access route might be possible, and it might reduce aesthetic impacts for views from eastbound SR 58 and some of the residences southwest from the project site. This alternative would also reduce operational and blasting noise effects in the vicinity by retaining the southerly ridge in the quarry as a barrier for residences located farther south. Truck traffic would have to use one of the steep and winding segments of SR 58, and would also pass through Santa Margarita so traffic and noise effects there would be similar to the proposed project.

Although it may have some benefits, there are significant constraints to this access, and the additional quarrying necessary to reach the main granitic mass of the project would also have aesthetic and other impacts of its own, discussed in the following paragraphs.

Using this eastern access drive alternative would require a major reconstruction of the service road intersection at SR 58 and the construction of a reinforced crossing over the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct. Since the topography of this section of the property makes construction of a road to the current site infeasible, mining would begin within a few hundred feet of the property boundary and move southwestward toward the main quarry site. As with the proposed project, a buffer of 200 feet would be maintained between quarry areas requiring blasting and the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct. With this approach, the southern ridgeline that would have been extracted in Phase 1A and 1B would be preserved, which would reduce aesthetic and blasting noise effects to residents to the south and traffic on SR 58. Although material extraction would be lost by the exclusion of Phase 1A and B, the new material gained from the northeast would likely match or exceed it.

This approach to the project design would also require removal of a portion of the southeastern ridgeline, possibly exposing portions of the quarry to view from SR 58 and to existing homes on Parkhill Road. Although the extent of this visual impact cannot be determined without detailed designs, it would be less than the impact of the project as proposed. In addition, this alternative would remove a major portion (about half) of the mature oak trees in the oak woodland habitat on the north-facing slopes in the northeastern part of the property. Thus, although some aesthetic impacts would be avoided others would

be created, and the biological impacts of this alternative would be greater than the proposed project.

6.7.3 Alternative Quarry Design – Narrow Cut Alternative

This alternative would make the slimmest cut possible through the southern ridgeline, retaining most of this visual shield between the eastern and western small ridges retained in the proposed project. A narrower cut in Phases 1A and 1B would have both a smaller exposed cut slope initially, and would also leave more of the ridgeline to block views into the later slopes in Phases 3A and 3B of the quarry. The general intent is that this narrower cut would appear as a slot or notch through the southern ridge. This alternative would not completely avoid the aesthetic impact of the project, but it would reduce it. Quarry operations and blasting noise may also be reduced in this alternative. Truck traffic would remain unchanged and the traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be similar to those of the proposed project.

Detailed designs for this alternative have not been prepared, but it would require altering the size and placement of the processing and stockpile yard and would reduce the volume of rock recovered in the overall quarry lifetime. The processing and stockpile area proposed in the project is about three acres in size to allow adequate area for material storage, work areas, and truck movement. It must be located at an elevation that can be reached by the access road at a grade that is safe for heavy truck traffic. The side slopes for the cut through the southern ridge would have to be maintained at an overall slope of 1.5:1 (horizontal: vertical) regardless of the cut's width. These constraints combine to require a relatively wide cut through the ridge to accommodate the processing and stockpile yard, which would reduce the intended effect of this alternative, or placement of the processing and stockpile area farther to the northwest, which may impact more of the biological habitat and drainage in this area. A different option within this alternative would be to move the quarry entrance, scale, scale house, and stockpile areas to a different location in the southern and flatter portions of the property. This would keep the cut through the southern ridgeline narrow, but would make more of the processing operations, storage areas, and related activities visible from SR 58 so the aesthetic impact may be judged to be worse.

In summary, this alternative would reduce the excavation through the southern ridge to a narrow cut or notch, and reduce the extent of views to the interior quarry slopes and, thus reduce aesthetic impacts. Some portion of the quarry would still be visible, however, and depending on design changes necessary to accomplish this alternative there may be additional aesthetic impacts if the quarry stockpiles and processing area become more visible. If the processing and stockpile area could be kept well north of the access road and out of view from SR 58, and if biological impacts did not increase significantly, then it may be considered environmentally superior to the proposed project. The CEQA Guidelines require the identification of an environmentally superior alternative if the No Project

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alternative is the only other alternative that is superior to the proposed project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2)). This “Narrow Cut Alternative” would have a reduced aesthetic impact when compared to the project, and would also have less noise impacts from operations and blasting since these activities would also be better shielded from residences to the south.

The major disadvantage of this alternative is the reduction in available aggregate material that could be recovered. Depending on the elevation of the processing and stockpile pad, and how this would affect the mine plan into the rest of the quarry, this alternative would reduce the available aggregate volume by at least 15 to 20 percent, and possibly more. Other aspects of the design and operation would remain as proposed, so the costs for the access road, water system, scale, scale house, and other facilities and equipment would not be altered.

6.8 ALTERNATIVE ACCESS ROUTE TO SR 58 VIA HANSON QUARRY

Some of the identified noise impacts of the project are associated with truck traffic through residential neighborhoods and the school zone along SR 58. Although other effects related to truck traffic have been found to be less than significant impacts, or can be mitigated to that level through other measures, they are still of concern to residents in the area. These other issues include traffic safety and air pollution from truck exhaust. In response to these issues, an alternative access route for truck traffic between the project site and SR 58 was considered. This route would use a combination of existing private roads plus construction of a new private road segment to move truck traffic to and from the project site via the existing Hanson Santa Margarita Quarry access road. The general location for this route is shown in Figure 6.8-1, and it consists of the following segments – starting at the project site and leading to El Camino Real between Santa Margarita and Atascadero:

- Quarry site to SR 58 using the access driveway as proposed
- SR 58 for 0.4 miles
- Existing private road (provides access to local residence and alternate access to Hanson Quarry)
- New road segment to bypass Hanson Quarry
- Existing Hanson Quarry Access Road
- El Camino Real either north or south to US Highway 101

From the intersection of El Camino Real and the Hanson Quarry access road, traffic from the proposed Oster/Las Pilitas Quarry could turn either northward or southward to access US Highway 101. Northbound traffic would use Santa Barbara Road in Atascadero, and southbound traffic would use SR 58 through the Santa Margarita village to reach the highway.

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This alternative access route would completely avoid truck traffic noise, safety, and other concerns raised by members of the community along the SR 58 segment east of Santa Margarita. In particular, it would avoid adding any truck traffic to Estrada Avenue and J Street in Santa Margarita, and thus avoid adding traffic in the vicinity of the school crossing for Santa Margarita Elementary School and through the adjacent residential neighborhood.

This alternative access route would reduce, but would not eliminate, truck traffic through the downtown Santa Margarita segment of SR 58. Traffic to and from aggregate market areas in the south would still use this segment of SR 58 to access US Highway 101. This would reduce the contribution of truck traffic to future noise levels at residents along SR 58 through downtown Santa Margarita, but cumulative traffic noise levels at these locations would still be significant (i.e., above 60 dBA CNEL). There would also be an increase in truck traffic noise along El Camino Real to the north and along Santa Barbara Road, but there is a designated truck route within the City of Atascadero (City of Atascadero 2002:Figure III-5).

The cost and feasibility of this alternative access route is not known. It would require obtaining permission from several property owners and/or easement holders who control the existing Hanson Quarry access road and the existing road that connects the Hanson Quarry south to SR 58 near the Salinas River. This southerly segment is not used by Hanson but it does connect between SR 58 and the southern portion of the Hanson Quarry, and runs through the quarry to the Hanson Quarry access road. As envisioned under this alternative, portions of this existing roadway system would be used and a new private roadway segment would be constructed to bypass the circuitous segment through the Hanson Quarry operation. The new roadway segment would be approximately three-quarters of a mile long, and would connect between the Hanson Quarry access road and the ranch road just south of the Hanson Quarry. There do not appear to be any major environmental constraints to this alternative since it would cross disturbed grasslands with a few very minor drainages. Just north of SR 58, however, the existing ranch road crosses the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct. Design of any road crossing improvement at this location would have to protect the structure of the aqueduct. The costs of improving the existing ranch road and developing the new road segment as described in this alternative would be in addition to the access and improvement costs associated with the project as proposed.

6.9 SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The conclusions expressed in Sections 6.5 through 6.8 are summarized in Table 6-1 below.

6.10 CONCLUSION

Thirteen alternative approaches have been identified in this Section; a “reasonable range of alternatives,” as required by Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines, has been provided. After consideration of these alternatives, the “Alternative Quarry Design – Narrow Cut,” as

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described above in Section 6.7.3, represents the environmentally superior alternative to the original project as proposed.

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**TABLE 6-1
SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative	Project Objective(s) Met	Project Objective(s) Not Met	Reduces Unmitigable Aesthetic and Noise Impacts?	Creates Other Environmental Impacts?
6.5 No Project	None	A, B, C, D, E and F	Yes, no further development would occur, except for agricultural uses.	None anticipated at project site, assuming future uses continue the practices of past agricultural uses.
6.6.1 Expansion of Existing Quarries	A, B, E and F	C and D.	Yes, but only at the proposed project site. Aesthetic, noise, and other impacts would continue at existing sites.	Probably, at the existing quarry sites.
6.6.2 Alternative Location #1	A, B, C, D and E	F	Yes. There are one or two residences relatively close to the northeast that would be affected by this location, but otherwise the surrounding areas are all vacant ranch land. Not visible from SR 58.	There currently is not an access road that can convey large vehicles to the site. An existing ranch road from SR 229 could provide access, but it would have to be upgraded and improved to accommodate large trucks. On SR 229, trucks would have to travel either northward through Creston to SR 41, or southward to SR 58. The northerly route would affect Creston, while the southerly route would necessitate travel on steep and winding sections of both SR 229 and SR 58, and would have effects in Santa Margarita identical to the proposed project.
6.6.3 Alternative Location #2	A, B, C, D and E	F	Partially. This alternative may be visible from westbound SR 58, but it may be possible to conceal it almost completely behind an existing ridgeline. Not visible from residences. Traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be unchanged.	Access to this site would require a reinforced crossing over the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct and the construction of an intersection at SR 58 to provide adequate turning radius. From this point, trucks to and from the site would use SR 58 and would have to travel on one if its steep and winding segments.
6.6.4 Alternative Location #3	A, C, D and E	B, F	Partially. Reduced impact on aesthetics, since it would be visible from fewer residences. Traffic and noise impacts in Santa Margarita would be unchanged.	Access would require either an intersection with SR 58 or a new road crossing the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct to connect to SR 229; and trucks would have to travel the steep winding section of SR 58 to reach the site. Although visual impacts would be reduced in regard

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**TABLE 6-1 (CONTINUED)
SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative	Project Objective(s) Met	Project Objective(s) Not Met	Reduces Unmitigable Aesthetic and Noise Impacts?	Creates Other Environmental Impacts?
				to neighboring residents, the alternative would be visible from SR 58 and perhaps also from SR 229.
6.6.5 Alternative Location #4	A, B, C, D and E	F	Partially. Reduced impact on aesthetics, since it would be visible from fewer residences. Effects in Santa Margarita would be identical to those of the proposed project.	It would be visible from SR 58 and it may be visible at the junction with SR 229 as well. Access is possible, but it would require road construction to connect it with SR 58. A large ridgeline may serve to separate this site from residences to the south along Parkhill Road, but the effectiveness of this barrier would depend on design.
6.6.6 Alternative Location #5	A, B, C, D and E	F	Partially. Reduced visual impacts on SR 58 traffic. Traffic and noise effects along SR 58 and through Santa margarita would be similar to those of the proposed project.	This alternative would have visual and traffic effects along Parkhill Road and to residents in that area. Any project here would have to rely on groundwater. Depending on location and depth, in dry years the potential water supply may not be sufficient.
6.6.7 Alternative Location #6	B, C, D and E	A, F	Partially. Aesthetic and noise effects would be reduced, since the location is not visible from any major roadways and there are very few residences nearby. Traffic and noise effects in Santa margarita would be similar to those from the project.	A new access road would have to be constructed into the property from Parkhill Road. Residents along Parkhill Road would experience additional truck traffic and roadway noise levels. Groundwater supplies in this area may be reduced in drought periods.
6.6.8 Alternative Location #7	B, C, D and E	A, F	Partially. This alternative would avoid or reduce direct visual and blasting noise effects for residents near the proposed project. The traffic and noise effects through Santa Margarita would be unchanged.	This location would require access to and use of Parkhill Road by heavy truck traffic and affect residents along this road and in the Rural Lands along Seven Oaks Way.
6.7.1 Western Access Driveway	B, D, E and F	A, C	Partially. This general approach would preserve the southern quarry ridge and would greatly reduce the	Cut and fill slopes for the access road would be visible to residences to the south and travelers on SR 58. If the eastern segment is placed closer to

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**TABLE 6-1 (CONTINUED)
SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative	Project Objective(s) Met	Project Objective(s) Not Met	Reduces Unmitigable Aesthetic and Noise Impacts?	Creates Other Environmental Impacts?
			visibility of cut slopes within the quarry itself from the south and southwest along This alternative would also reduce operational and blasting noise effects in the area. Effects related to truck traffic along SR 58 and through Santa Margarita would be identical to those in the proposed project. SR 58.	the Salinas River, it would affect 10 to 20 oak trees and be closer to the riparian corridor and proposed Salinas River trail. The northerly segment entering the quarry site would remove an additional 10 to 20 oak trees.
6.7.2 Eastern Access Driveway	B, C, D, E and F	A	Partially. A re-design of the quarry using this eastern alternate access route might reduce aesthetic impacts for views from eastbound SR 58 and some of the residences southwest from the project site. This alternative would also reduce operational and blasting noise effects in the vicinity by retaining the southerly ridge in the quarry. Traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be similar to the proposed project.	This alternative would require a major reconstruction of the service road intersection at SR 58. The additional quarrying necessary to reach the main granitic mass of the project would have aesthetic and other impacts of its own. This alternative would remove about half of the mature oak trees in the oak woodland habitat in the northeastern part of the property and biological impacts would be greater than the proposed project.
6.7.3 Alternative Quarry Design – Narrow Cut	A, B, D, E and F	C	Partially. This alternative would reduce the excavation through the southern ridge to a narrow cut or notch, and reduce but not completely avoid the aesthetic impact of the project. Quarry operations and blasting noise may also be reduced in this alternative. Truck traffic would remain unchanged and the traffic and noise effects in Santa Margarita would be similar to those of the proposed project.	Depending on design changes necessary to accomplish this alternative there may be additional biology impacts if the processing area and stockpiles are moved to the northwest, or aesthetic impacts if they are moved to the access area and become more visible.

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**TABLE 6-1 (CONTINUED)
SUMMARY OF PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative	Project Objective(s) Met	Project Objective(s) Not Met	Reduces Unmitigable Aesthetic and Noise Impacts?	Creates Other Environmental Impacts?
6.8 Alternative Access Route	A, B, C, E, F	D	Partially. Would avoid Truck noise impacts along Estrada Avenue and J Street segments of SR 58, and would reduce truck noise impacts along SR 58 through Santa Margarita village area.	Construction impacts along new and improved roadway segments would all likely be mitigable. Minor increase in truck noise effects along truck route to the north via El Camino Real and Santa Barbara Road to US Highway 101.