

Austin Quarry Briefing Book

Version 5

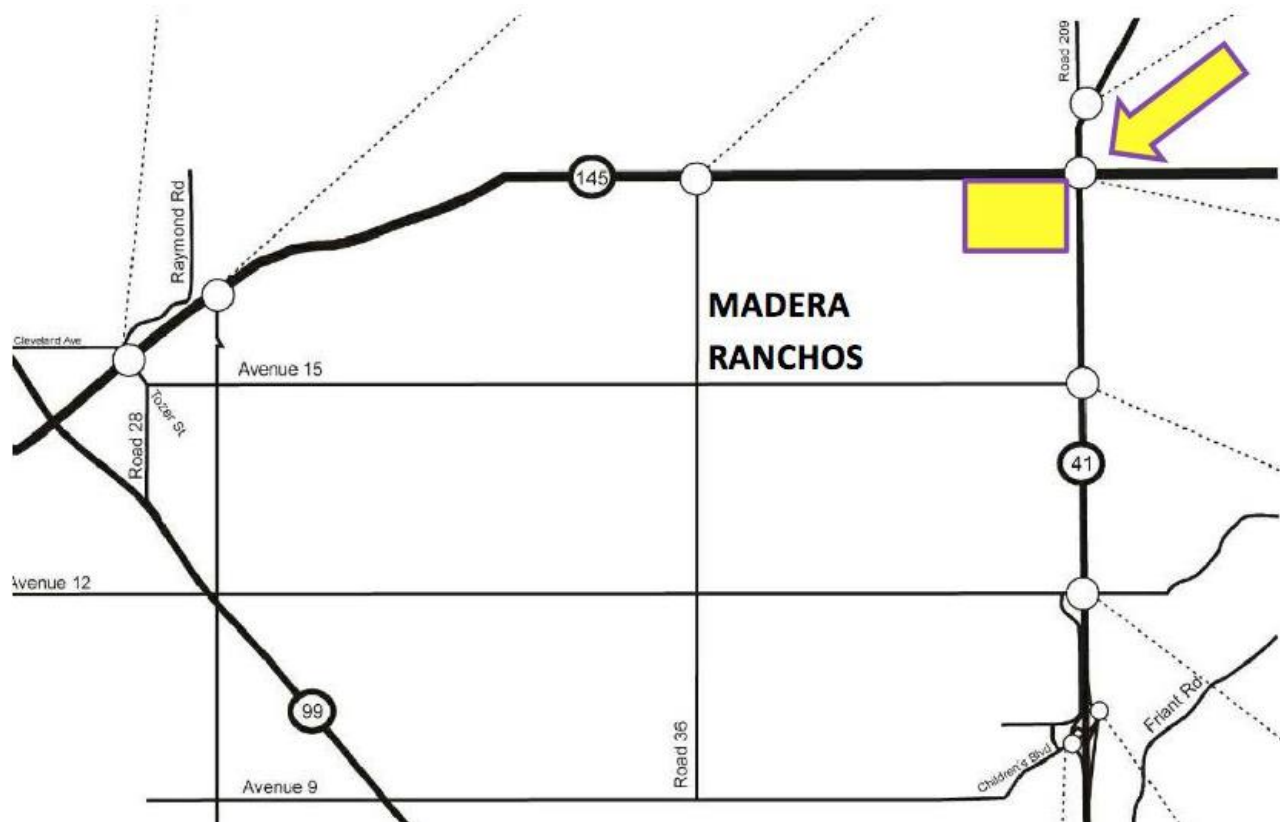
July 27, 2016

[includes Final Environmental
Impact Report, released July
2016]

By: Madera Oversight Coalition

Introduction.

Vulcan Materials, the nation’s largest producer of aggregate, proposes to open Madera County’s largest quarry ever less than 3 miles east of Madera Ranchos, near the intersection of Routes 41 and 145. This is a 100-year project that will last the lives of our children and grandchildren. This briefing book has been prepared to summarize the project and the issues it raises.



Environmental Impact Report.

In early July, 2016, Vulcan’s consultant released the Final Environmental Impact Report, which consists of 10 volumes spanning over 11,000 pages. In this document, known as the “EIR,” Vulcan tells the story of the project using maps, charts and diagrams. Despite the seemingly scientific format, the EIR strategically avoids admitting to many of the impacts of the project. The EIR also presents a boosterish “economic report” by non-economists, which makes optimistic claims and ignores the enormous negative economic consequences of the project.

Project Highlights:

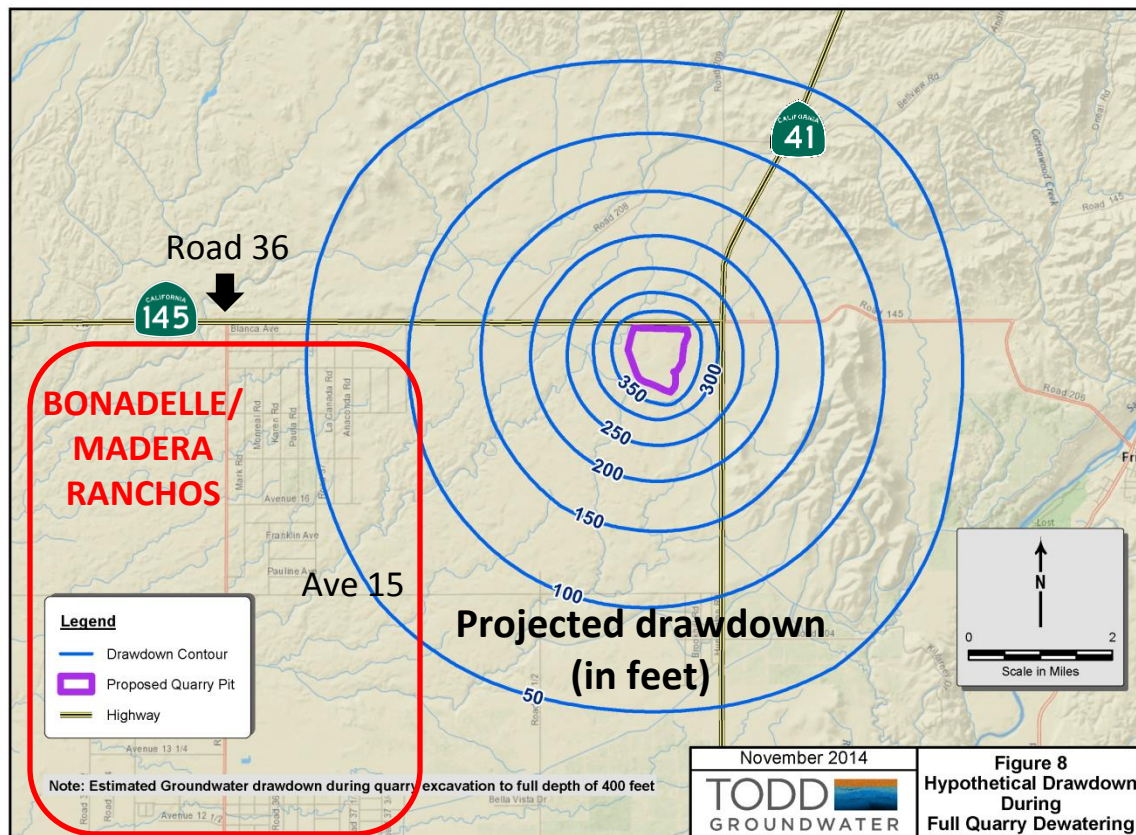
- ✓ Open 24/7. Permit allows operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, limited only by the operator's business demands.
- ✓ Lasts Forever. 100 year term means ten decades of impacts. Even after that, steep-walled quarry pit would not be filled in and would remain forever.
- ✓ Dries Out Our Wells. 258-acre, 400-foot deep quarry pit would drain up to 4,000 acre feet of water per year from the already overdrafted Madera Groundwater Basin, causing well levels to drop for miles around, including in Madera Ranchos and Bonadelle Ranchos.
- ✓ Pours Trucks Onto Our Roads. Dumps up to 3,848 new trucks per day onto Routes 41 and 145, degrading levels of service (LOS) throughout the local road system. Vulcan says it will fund a new 3-mile-long southbound lane on Route 41, but that won't get built until at least 2023 – 6 years after the quarry starts operating. Vulcan also offers to pay “fair share” toward road improvements, but no one knows where the rest of the money would come from.
- ✓ Wakes Up Our Neighbors. Many residences are along routes between the quarry and its customers. 18-wheelers will rumble by homes day and night.
- ✓ Pollutes Our Air. Increases ozone and other pollutants in an already-polluted region and subjects nearby neighbors to localized health effects.
- ✓ Clutters Our Rural Landscape. Towering plant equipment and material stockpiles would be visible from Route 41, Route 145 and nearby homes, and light pollution from nighttime operations would be seen from miles around.
- ✓ Displaces New Residential Development. 348-acre site could be used for 1,000 homes. With a quarry as a neighbor, other nearby property will be unsuitable for residences due to noise, fumes and dust from constant blasting and asphalt plant.
- ✓ Doesn't Create New Jobs. Generates only 15 to 40 jobs, and zero construction jobs. Residential development on the same site could generate thousands of construction jobs.
- ✓ Hurts Property Values. Reduces value of residential property within 5 miles by up to 20 percent.
- ✓ Doesn't Help the County Budget. An independent economic consultant retained by the County estimates that the County will receive \$141,135 per year in sales tax and \$91,831 per year in property tax, for a total of about \$233,000. This is less than 10 cents per ton of quarry product, and is offset by huge losses in taxable value of nearby property and other economic losses to Madera County residents.

Issue # 1: Water.

A new 400-foot deep, 258-acre hole blasted into our groundwater aquifer, drawing down wells for miles around.

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR says that the enormous quarry pit would have only 90 acre-feet of groundwater inflow per year, and that the already-overdrafted Madera Groundwater Basin would not be affected because the quarry is not connected to the basin. Vulcan also proposes to send an average of 100 acre feet to Madera County through a water transfer to Root Creek Water District.

What's the Real Story? In an [independent report](#), hydrologist Iris Priestaf of Todd Groundwater (formerly Todd Engineers), who prepared Madera County's Groundwater Management Plan in 2002, says that the amount of water entering the pit could be as much as 4,000 acre feet per year, which is the amount of water typically used by about 8,000 dwelling units. This would create a depression that would draw down wells within a 5-mile radius, affecting dozens of farmers and thousands of residents of Madera Ranchos and Bonadelle Ranchos.



For More Information: See [Evaluation of Potential Groundwater Impacts, Austin Quarry Project](#), Todd Groundwater, November 3, 2014.

Issue #2: Traffic.

Up to 3,848 new trucks dumped each day onto Routes 41 and 145, and one truck every 10 seconds during the AM rush hour.

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR says the project would generate 816 truck trips per day and 126 trips during the AM rush hour. (EIR, pg. 3.11-20.) It admits that this traffic would degrade levels of service (LOS) at *most* nearby intersections and road segments along Routes 41 and 145, some to unacceptable levels (D, E or F). (EIR, pg. 3.11-31-3.11-34.) Although road improvements would mitigate some impacts, the only ones Vulcan would construct are a new 1-mile lane between its own project entrance and the intersection of Routes 145 and 41 (to help quarry trucks merge into traffic), and a new 3-mile-long southbound lane on Route 41 (which wouldn't get built until at least 2023 – 6 years after the quarry starts operating). For all other needed improvements, Vulcan proposes only to pay its “fair share” toward the improvements, via County Road Impact Fees, a CalTrans fee and certain other nonspecific sharing methods. Yet, it freely admits that this is not enough to truly mitigate the traffic impacts of the project:

“Notwithstanding the Project’s payment of its proportional share toward the necessary improvements, due to uncertainties with regard to the timing and ultimate installation of the required improvements, it cannot be determined with certainty that the improvements would be installed before the need for their benefits in accommodating regional and Project-related traffic. Further, in some instances as disclosed above, at certain locations there is no feasible set of improvements that would achieve acceptable levels of service under future conditions with or without the Project.”

EIR at pp. 3.11-51.

What’s the Real Story? An [independent report](#) by traffic engineering firm Translutions, Inc. confirms that the quarry’s operations can peak at more than 4 times the average daily production, generating up to 3,848 trucks per day and 350 trucks per hour at the AM rush hour, for extended periods. The EIR says that the County must accept something less than full mitigation for these impacts. However if, as Vulcan claims, the County is powerless to mitigate the impacts of the quarry, it can still avoid them by simply denying the project.

For More Information: See EIR, at pages 3.11-1 to 3.11-60 and Table 3.11-6; [Traffic comment letter #1](#), Translutions, Inc., January 3, 2015; [Traffic comment letter #2](#), Tom Brohard and Associates, January 5, 2015.

Issue #3: Noise.

Trucks rumbling through residential areas, day and night.

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR admits that truck traffic can disturb residential neighbors, and when the traffic is at night it can cause sleep disturbance. Yet the EIR insists that residential neighbors of the routes used by quarry trucks are far enough away from the road that they won't hear truck traffic – *as long as they keep their windows closed*. (EIR at 3.10-39.) As for those residences where people use their windows for fresh air, the EIR says they are out of luck:

“Due to the number of potentially affected residences (all residences within 100 feet of any road that might be used by a project-related truck trip during the nighttime hours), mitigation options are limited and infeasible. It is not feasible to require residents along project haul routes to close their windows during night paving projects, and it is not feasible to identify and construct off-site noise barriers to reduce building façade noise exposure along all potentially traveled roadways. Furthermore, improvements to window assemblies or building façade construction would have little effect if windows are in the open position and noise impacts are not anticipated when windows are in the closed position. As a result, no feasible mitigation is available for this impact and the impact is considered significant and unavoidable for this EIR.”

EIR, pg. 3.10-40.

What's the Real Story? According to an [independent report](#), windows open or not, there are numerous homes on Route 145 and Route 41 that are close enough to the road to be affected by noise from truck traffic. In addition, with up to 3,848 trucks coming and going to the quarry each day from all directions, many hundreds of these trucks will surely stray from the obvious main routes and use roadways like Avenue 15, Road 36, Cleveland Avenue and Friant Road, where hundreds of residences are directly adjacent to the roadway.

For More Information: See EIR, at pages 3.10-1 to 3.10-43; [Noise comment letter](#), Dale La Forest & Associates January 5, 2015.

Issue # 4: Air.

More emissions in a polluted air basin and residents exposed to local impacts.

What Does Vulcan Say? Vulcan admits that quarry operations and truck traffic would worsen air quality, especially since existing conditions in the 8-county San Joaquin Valley Air Basin are already at “nonattainment” levels for numerous pollutants, including ozone and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). (EIR at pg. 3.3-9, Table 3.3-1.) On this basis, the EIR concedes that the project would have a significant impact on air quality. However, the EIR then proceeds to minimize the contribution of this particular project to the existing problem.

What’s the Real Story? The fact is, this large heavy industrial project and its associated blasting, asphalt plant and trucking would dramatically worsen air quality in the shared air basin – so much so that even the EIR concedes that ozone would be increased by .3% above “Peak Background Concentration” in the entire 8-county basin from just this single project. (EIR at pg. 3.3-74, Table 3.3-21.) In other words, if just 33 projects like this were adopted by the various counties that constitute the air basin, ozone in this already-saturated basin would increase by an astounding ten percent. In fact, by approving Austin Quarry, which creates fewer than 40 jobs, the County could foreclose itself from approving other industry that would have the same emissions but which would create many more jobs. In addition to regional impacts, individuals living in residences along the trucking routes will be exposed to localized impacts from heavy-duty diesel truck traffic, especially along Route 145 and Route 41. The EIR doesn’t even mention the possible health effects on these “maximally exposed individuals,” known as MEIs.



For More Information: See EIR, at pages 3.3-1 to 3.3-106; [Air Quality comment letter](#), Autumn Wind Associates, January 4, 2015.

Issue # 5:Aesthetics.

Towering plant equipment and material stockpiles visible from roadways and residences, and bright light from nighttime operations filling the sky for miles.

What Does Vulcan Say? The EIR includes a routine “aesthetics” analysis which depicts various perspectives on Routes 41 and 145 and then inserts the simulated quarry operation. The conclusion: Installing “tree clusters” and a 10-foot berm would obscure views of the quarry during the day. At night, when operations are permitted, “skyglow” would be reduced by use of fixtures approved by the “International Dark Sky Association” and by “confin[ing] illumination to the Project site.” (EIR at pp. 3.1-37 to 3.1-39.)



What’s the Real Story? The EIR’s own simulation from Route 145 (above) shows that even with a 10-foot berm and new trees, the quarry stockpiles and equipment would be prominently visible. (EIR at pg. 3.1-33, Figure 3.1-10.) If, as proposed, Vulcan uses trees to obscure all views of the site, then the long lines of trees would destroy the rural openness of the area. Meanwhile, at night the use of fixtures approved by the International Dark Sky Association would merely reduce impacts; it wouldn’t eliminate them. The fact is, a large plant operation must be fully lit for operational and safety reasons. This reservoir of light will be visible from miles around, including in Madera Ranchos and Bonadelle Ranchos.

For More Information: See EIR at pp. 3.1-1 to 3.1-39.

Issue #6: Our Economy

Home values down 20 percent and no new jobs or tax revenue.

What Does Vulcan Say? Vulcan presents a report from two authors who aren't even economists: Their degrees are in sociology, planning and public policy. (EIR, Vol. 9, Appendix L-1, at pg. 38.) The report makes boosterish statements, such as that the quarry's product will be "sourced in an environmentally sustainable manner, and with sensitivity and commitment to its neighboring communities." (Appendix L-1 at pg. 11.) Real economists don't talk like that.

What's the Real Story? A consultant retained by the County admits that the County will receive just \$141,135 per year in sales tax and \$91,831 per year in property tax, for a total of about \$233,000, or less than 10 cents per ton of quarry product. (EIR at Volume 9, Appendix L-2, at pp. 5-6.) Meanwhile, an [independent report](#) by economist Dr. Gary Smith of Pomona College concludes:

- There is no compelling evidence of a shortage of aggregate in Madera County, so the assumption that a new quarry is needed is faulty. (#1, pp. 2-3)
- The quarry would not increase the amount of aggregate produced, but instead would merely shift production, jobs, and County revenue from other quarries in the County. (#6, pg. 14)
- The quarry would reduce property values within a 5-mile radius by up to 20%, for a total loss of \$443 million to \$738 million. (#2, pp. 5-8)
- The reduction in property values would reduce annual County property tax revenue by \$0.9 million to \$1.6 million. (#3, pg. 9)
- Increased travel times would cost residents between \$1.7 million and \$3.4 million each year. (#4, pp. 10-12)
- The quarry only needs 15 to 40 workers, and these include specialized workers who would commute from outside Madera County. (#9, pg. 18)
- If the quarry site were developed with 1,000 residences, it would generate \$4.5 million per year in property tax, over 3,000 temporary construction jobs, and dozens of long-term service jobs. (#7, pp. 15-16; #9, pp. 18-19)

For More Information: See [Economic Costs and Benefits of the Proposed Austin Quarry in Madera County](#), Gary Smith, Ph.D, October 23, 2014.