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Subject: El Monte Sand Mine & Nature Preserve PDS2015-MUP-98-014W2, PDS2015-RP-15-001, LOG NO. PDS2015-ER-98-14-016B

September 14, 2015

Dear Mr. Bennett,

The subject of my letter is in regards to the proposed sand mine in the El Monte Valley being operated by the El Monte Sand Mine and Nature Preserve. To follow is a list of my concerns about this project and I will cover each individually in this document. My expectation is that your department will take careful consideration of my concerns when completing the EIR and hold the El Monte Sand Mine & Nature Preserve accountable for answering each environmental challenge presented.

My first concern is the destruction of thousands of years of nature at work as illustrated by the photo below of the El Monte Valley as viewed from the West. This is the perspective from my home and I believe gives a fairly accurate outline of the 100' deep sand mine that is proposed.

- What other structures or out buildings will be needed to clean the sand, maintain the heavy equipment, etc.?

The claim that the El Monte Sand Mine and Nature Preserve could dig a 100' deep pit and somehow reclaim nature that took thousands of years to create is completely ludicrous. There is not a single case in San Diego County where any sand mine/ reclamation project has ever been completed. There are two reasons as to why this has been the case. One, there is no system for accountability on the company's part. No accountability to follow the plan that they set for or accountability that they must complete the work that is proposed. The second reason for this is that it would be impossible for any company to rebuild what it has taken nature millions of years to create. Especially after ripping a 200-acre by 100' deep hole in the earth. The impact to nature will be overwhelming and ruined for many generations. Nature that has evolved so perfectly cannot be recreated by man, and should be reason enough for the company's not passing the requirements set forth in the EIR.

My family moved to the El Monte Valley for it's peace and natural beauty, which will certainly be destroyed should the project be approved, at the very least, for the next 15 years. The value of my property is largely based on the view from my home.

- Who will be responsible for the decline in my properties value?

- What accountability will the mining company be held to and who is going to police them to insure that they are ever going to what they propose?

With no accountability there should be no mine.

I am very concerned about the Health Effects that will be created by the proposed mining of sand from the El Monte Valley. One of which is Valley Fever.

- How will the threat of Valley Fever be contained, and if contracted who will be responsible for lost wages due to illness, medical costs, and continued treatment and monitoring of the disease?

Valley fever is an infection caused by a fungus called *Coccidioides*. The fungus is found in the soil and the spores can get into the air when the soil is disrupted by farming, construction, wind or other activities. When spores are inhaled, valley fever can result. Anyone can get valley fever, but it most commonly occurs in people who are frequently exposed to soil and dust in areas where the fungi are present (endemic areas) and in adults aged 60 and older. The most common way for someone to get valley fever is by inhaling the fungal spores that are in the air following a disturbance in the soil in which they live. Some people may be at higher risk of developing severe infection, these groups include:

- People who have weakened immune systems or have had an organ transplant
- People who are taking medications such as corticosteroids or tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-inhibitors
- Pregnant women
- People who have diabetes
- Certain ethnicities, including Black, Filipino, Hispanic, Native American and Asian. *

*The description above is from <http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/diseases/valley-fever>

Valley Fever is known to exist in the soil of the El Monte Valley and will certainly be disturbed by the mining that will take place. Not only from the removal of the soil from the ground, but by the movement of excavating equipment and trucks that are doing the work. Considering where I live and the location of the El Monte Valley, a Santa Ana wind could carry the disease to 100,000s of people south, including my family and to the west of the valley including the communities of Lakeside, Santee, El Cajon and San Diego.

* I am very concerned about the environmental impacts that will be created through the use of water being used to clean the sand on the site. It has been stated that over 43 million gallons of water will be used in the first year of the 15-year project alone. The water will come from wells drilled on site. Both the short term and long term effects of this kind of water usage will effect not only the inhabitants of the valley, all of which rely on well water for every day use and agriculture, but on the rest of San Diego County.

- Will there be a baseline measurement taken of all the wells in the valley to insure that the plant is not destroying peoples livelihoods and lifestyles?

- Will the sand mine be paying, an impartial contractor, to measure and tests wells on a regular basis for both water levels and contamination?

- What tests will be done during the length of the project to determine down river contamination?

- How will the runoff effect the river below and all the way to the ocean? How will this be monitored?

* I am very concerned about the vehicle traffic that will increase due to the proposed 2 to 500 truckloads of sand that will leave the valley each day. El Monte Road is a small two-lane road and the only access in and out of the valley. The traffic must exit off of El Monte Road onto Lake Jennings Park road to the South or North down Maplevue St. through Lakeside. The resident's inability to leave the valley quickly due to fire will be limited by the truck traffic.

- How will this be accounted for?

Lake Jennings park road is extremely busy and there have been several fatality accidents on the road without the increased truck traffic. There will be a negative impact on young drivers at El Capitan High School and bicyclists on El Monte Road as well.

- What will be done to measure the increased traffic and to insure that safe levels of traffic are not exceeded on any given day or at any given time?

- What will be the rate of inspection to insure safe numbers of vehicles?

- What will the cost be to the County to maintain the roadways after the heavy trucks and equipment do damage?

* I am very concerned about the pollution that the sand mine will create. The pollution will have a negative impact on the environment, people's health and serene nature of the valley. The ozone and dust particulates created by the trucks and heavy equipment will have a negative impact on children, athletes and the elderly. The long-term effects on the environment include global warming due to the hydrocarbons being put off from the vehicles and equipment operating more than 10 hours per day. We will no longer be able to open our windows to fresh air due to the dust that will be created. The cost of running air and heat year round in our home is unaffordable.

- Who will pay for the increased expense so that our health is not compromised? This is not considering those in the valley that do not have central air and heat. Running my air conditioner is also detrimental to the environment and will increase the amount of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere that cause global warming. Multiply that times the total amount of households in the El Monte Valley, Blossom Valley and surrounding areas. SDG&E should also be concerned during a high usage alert when I have no choice, but to leave my air conditioner running due to the pollution and dust in the air.

- Will the APCD be consulted to conduct studies in regards to the pollution that will be created?

I believe that they would be interested in the run off of chemicals and contaminated dust particles as they end up in the storm water system as they result of trucks and heavy equipment.

- How will the dust and pollution issues be resolved? Water, a scarce resource will obviously be used in massive amounts.

- Is the mining of sand for profit in our backyard a reasonable enterprise during a time of drought?

- What are the long and short-term effects to the watershed? Sand is already being imported from Arizona and Mexico where the environmental impacts are less. I would suggest reading the study done by San Diego State on sand mines. This is the link: http://threeissues.sdsu.edu/three_issues_sandminingfacts01.html

* I am very concerned about contamination of the wells in the area as well as the aquifer. The contamination of wells throughout the valley due to oil spills and chemicals being used to control dust and clean sand is a concern.

- Where are the trucks going to refuel?

- How will the fuel get to the proposed mining site? Fuel spills are likely. What steps will be taken to insure that when fuel spills happen they will be reported and cleaned up appropriately?

- Is the intention that an enterprise so large self police itself? With truck traffic planned at up to 500 trips per day there will need to be thousands of gallons of fuel on the mining site at any one time. That fuel also needs to be trucked in.

- What steps will be taken to mitigate the danger of driving large fuel tankers through residential areas and past local schools around Lakeside? With access to large amounts of fuel and agricultural fertilizers nearby, are concerns about acts of terrorism being addressed?

* I am very concerned about the noise that the sand mine will create in the valley. The valley is essentially a funnel for sound. I can hear a dog bark from over 2 miles away at my neighbor's home just east of us. When the mining project at Hanson pond was operating, trucks entered the valley at 5:30 am and the operators of those trucks left them to idle until the mine opened at 7:00 am each morning. The noise was disruptive to both nature and the residents of the valley. The decibel levels coming from the plant as well as the trucks will cause a negative impact on both humans and animals. My right to live in a peaceful valley will be disrupted along with everyone that lives here.

- What sound analysis will be done to insure that noise levels are not loud enough to ruin the nature of the valley?

- Will those levels be monitored daily and throughout the length of the project?

* I am very concerned about the loss of habitat for many species of animals during the mining phases of the project. The El Monte Valley is home to tree frogs, raccoons, quail, road runners, owls, raptors, egret, yellow warblers, the checker spot butterfly, elderberry longhorn beetles, willow fly catcher, red diamond back rattle snake, rosy boa, great grey horned owls, San Diego ring-necked snake, Laguna skipper, Zayante band winged grasshopper, Quino checker spot butterfly, Swallow tail butterfly, Ceanothus moth, several species of sensitive bats, horned lizards, deer, bobcats, golden eagles, redheaded woodpeckers, and endangered species like the least Bell's vireos, arroyo toad and gnat catchers. The valley is also home to many species of plants including oak trees, Sycamores, Chapparal plants, Willows, and Elderberry trees. These plants and animals will either be destroyed or displaced due to the mining. This is a fairly complete list, but a study should be done over several years of both drought and rain to determine all of the species that exist and are active in the valley.

- Some species lie dormant in times of drought so will this be taken into account when determining the length of the study?

The valley is an important wildlife corridor. The mining operation will completely block the valley for the wildlife.

- What will be done to ensure that wildlife has a though fare through the valley?

- What will be done to replace the flora that will be destroyed?

- Will there be a count done of all the plants to insure, that at minimum, the valley will be restored to its current state?

- Will the animals be counted to ensure that their numbers do not diminish as a result of the mining operation?

- How will he sand mining company be held accountable to insure that the land is reclaimed and returned to a better state than it is now?

- Will the sand mining company be granted an extension on their 15-year lease if they have not followed the plan to the letter?

- How will the funding be guaranteed for reclamation once the sand is removed?

It is my opinion that this will be extremely difficult due to the LLC nature of the company itself. There is no accountability. As mentioned earlier, no sand mining company has ever been held accountable for restoration in San Diego County.

* I am very concerned about the loss of trails and access to the area. The El Monte Valley is a scenic destination for horse riders, bicyclists, and hikers. Reducing the amount of recreational space people need to lead active lifestyles and healthy lives will be detrimental

to their health. Don't we want people to be healthier? The health costs to the County are already enormous.

- Will the sand mine operation be responsible for those costs?

- Will their contribution to County coffers offset the health related costs to the County?

- Will the county insure that the mining company does what it says and incorporate trails throughout the term of the project?

- Who will monitor this and hold the sand mining company accountable?

* I am very concerned about the water that will be exposed and pooled from digging down to the aquifer. Water warming in the sun is prime breeding ground for vector diseases such as West Nile Virus and Dengue fever, which are carried by mosquitoes. Other concerns include unmonitored public access to the ponds that will be created through mining. The steep sides will be dangerous and drowning may occur. Public safety is paramount and will be jeopardized by the mine. Hanson pond is a good example of how a sand mine turned pond is left in disrepair and unmonitored. Transients have turned it into a campground. The result has been an increased level in crime and a safety concern for my family. Children sneak into the site through fencing in disrepair to swim and fish in the lake.

- Has testing been done on the water in the pond to determine if it is safe?

- If it is not safe, is this not a good example of what we are to expect from the proposed mine operation?

* I am very concerned about the loss of life and property should a flood occur during the mining. Digging a 200 acre, 100' deep pit will create a low spot in the valley where the floodwaters will rush taking with it property, homes, livestock and potentially human life. A similar scenario happened the last time water went over the top of the dam at the El Capitan reservoir. A local valley man lost over 9 acres in the resulting flood. His 9 acres ended up in the bottom of the sand mine of that time.

- What engineering studies will be done to ensure that this scenario is not repeated?

There will be another flood and property will be lost if the mining operation is approved.

* I very am concerned about the loss of Native American artifacts as I have a degree in art and hold these things dear. Native Americans have lived in the valley for thousands of years. Many people have found ancient pottery and tools in the valley.

- What will be done to mitigate the loss of our archaeological artifacts?

- Who will ensure that the mining company reports all artifacts that are exposed?

* Lastly and most importantly, I am very concerned that past EIRs for sand mining and golf course projects will be used to create this new EIR for the proposed sand mine. This is a new project with different scope in a new time and the EIR should contain all new findings.

- How can we as citizens be sure that the old information is relevant and how do we know that what information is used from old EIRs is appropriate or complete?

This is a new project, with new people in a new time. It would be a mistake to not start with a completely new EIR just to save time and money at the County.

I am expecting that all of the concerns I have pointed out will be covered in the new EIR and that you will do your best to insure that the natural beauty of the valley is preserved and the health and safety needs of everyone in the El Monte Valley region are met.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Erin Garth

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