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San Rafael Rock Quarry applies for 20-year mining extension



An aerial photo of the San Rafael Rock Quarry. (Courtesy of County of Marin)

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The owner of the San Rafael Rock Quarry has applied for a 20-year extension to its agreement with Marin County, which would give the company the green light to continue mining on the site until 2044.

When the county approved a mining permit and reclamation plan for the quarry in 2010, Dutra Group, which owns the quarry, said it expected to stop mining the site at 1000 Point San Pedro Road by 2024. But production at the quarry has slowed over the past decade, said Aimi Dutra, a company spokeswoman. As a result, the company needs more time to extract the 17.5 million tons of rock that are part of the quarry's vested mining rights, she said.

"When we entered into this new agreement, we had an expectation that our production levels would remain as they had been historically," Dutra said. "That didn't turn out to be the case."

On average, the company annually extracts less than half of the amount of material it did 10 years ago, according to Dutra. She said that's largely due to the decreased demand for construction materials for both public and private construction projects in the wake of the Great Recession.

The Dutra Group's agreement with the county allows the company to change its timeline for mining operations, but it must first seek permission from the county Board of Supervisors.

In its 1,360-page application, submitted to the county late last month, the Dutra Group asks for county approval on the company's updated quarry reclamation plan, which accounts for an additional 20 years of mining. But the application doesn't ask for any changes to the 173 conditions that the county imposed on the Dutra Group in its 2010 agreement.

Those conditions included limiting operation hours, limiting the number of daily truck trips in and out of the quarry and establishing a maximum annual production limit.

“We’re in full compliance with that permit,” Dutra said. “We haven’t received very many complaints in the last several years. The programs are working and that’s a positive thing for the community and for Dutra.”

Many residents who live near the quarry, which is located at the edge of the San Francisco Bay, said that the county’s conditions have made the quarry a better neighbor.

“The operations have been much more neighbor-friendly,” said resident Nick Clark.

The Dutra Group’s agreement with the county came after decades of disputes between the company and its San Rafael neighbors.

When the Dutra Group purchased the quarry in 1986, the company expanded operations on the site beyond what was allowed by the county. Residents living nearby complained about increases in noise, dust and truck traffic. A group of residents formed the Point San Pedro Road Coalition and, in 2002, joined the county and the state Attorney General’s Office in a lawsuit against the company, alleging it violated its legal entitlements.



A truck loaded with rock makes its way out of the pit at the San Rafael Rock Quarry. (Robert Tong/Marin Independent Journal file photo)

In 2004, Marin Superior Court Judge John Sutro ordered the Dutra Group to submit a new reclamation plan, which the county approved in 2010. Sutro criticized the company for expanding mining operations without permits, but he said Dutra had the right to make a fair profit by mining the quarry bowl without limits on depth or duration. Sutro noted the quarry's status as a valuable asset of regional importance. The facility, which began operating in the 1870s, provides rock riprap for Delta

levees and emergency flood protection. It also provides gravel, asphaltic concrete and sand for local roads and other public works.

When mining ceases, Dutra plans to cut a channel between the pit and the bay, create a 600-berth marina and develop 350 homes as well as office and commercial buildings, according to the reclamation plan. The company hasn't applied for approval of those construction plans.

Some neighbors want the quarry to close as quickly as possible, and object to any extensions.

"I am not in favor of trashing the bay and the hills for the sake of a quarry," said resident Jannick Rosenblatt.

But a spokeswoman for the Point San Pedro Road Coalition, which has continued to act as a quarry watchdog, said the coalition understands that production has slowed in recent years, and that the Dutra Group has "the right" to modify its timeline for mining and site restoration.

The coalition is “still reviewing the application” and hasn’t yet taken an official position on whether the Dutra Group has adequately addressed the environmental impacts of an additional 20 years of mining, said coalition co-president Bonnie Marmor.

But Marmor said the county’s 172 operating conditions, if enforced, “will protect the community from any substantial adverse impacts on our neighborhoods.”

A Board of Supervisors hearing on the Dutra Group’s application has not been scheduled, according to a county official. The company’s annual community meeting, in which quarry staff provides information and answers questions about operations, is scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday at the quarry.

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