

CHAPTER I

Introduction

A. Environmental Review

The project applicant, North Bay Construction, Inc., proposes to develop a quarry (Roblar Road Quarry) in southern Sonoma County, approximately five miles west of the City of Cotati. The project applicant has requested the necessary entitlements from the County of Sonoma to enable development of the quarry. Approval of this request would grant a use permit for mining for a 20-year period, under the terms of the County's Aggregate Resource Management (ARM) Plan, mining regulations, and any approval conditions that are imposed. The proposed project would disturb approximately 70 acres (including a 65-acre quarry pit) of the approximate 199-acre parcel over a 20-year mining period. The Roblar Road Quarry proposes to mine approximately 570,000 cubic yards of quarry material annually (approximately 2,260 cubic yards per day).

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that before a decision can be made to approve a project with potentially significant environmental effects, an EIR must be prepared that fully describes the environmental effects of the project. The EIR is a public information document for use by governmental agencies and the public to identify and evaluate potential environmental consequences of a proposed project, to recommend mitigation measures to lessen or eliminate adverse impacts, and to examine feasible alternatives to the project. The information contained in the EIR is reviewed and considered by the governing agency prior to the ultimate decision to approve, disapprove, or modify the proposed project.

CEQA requires that the Lead Agency (in this case, the County of Sonoma) shall neither approve nor implement a project as proposed unless the project's significant environmental effects have been reduced to a less-than-significant level, essentially "eliminating, avoiding, or substantially lessening" the expected impact. If the Lead Agency approves the project despite residual significant adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels, the agency must state the reasons for its action in writing. This "Statement of Overriding Considerations" must be included in the record of project approval.

On August 4, 2004, the County sent a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to governmental agencies and organizations and persons interested in the project. The NOP is included as Appendix A. The NOP requested those agencies with regulatory authority over any aspect of the project to describe that authority and to identify the relevant environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR. In addition, the County held a public scoping meeting on September 1, 2004, at Dunham Elementary School in Sonoma County.

During the time the Draft EIR is available for public review, written comments on the adequacy of the Draft EIR may be submitted to the County. Responses to all substantive comments received on the adequacy of the Draft EIR and submitted within the specified review period will be included and responded to in the Final EIR. Prior to approval of the project, the County must certify the Final EIR and adopt a reporting and monitoring program for mitigation measures identified in this report in accordance with the requirements of Public Resources Code Section 21081.

B. This EIR

This EIR has been prepared by the County of Sonoma as Lead Agency in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act. This EIR is intended to provide the information and environmental analysis necessary to assist public agency decision-makers in considering all of the approvals necessary to implement the proposed project.

In conformance with CEQA, California *Public Resources Code*, Section 21000 *et. seq.*, this EIR provides objective information addressing the environmental consequences of the proposed project and possible means of reducing or avoiding its potentially significant impacts.

The guidelines for implementing CEQA help define the role of this EIR:

15121 (a) Information Document. An EIR is an informational document which will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effect(s) of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project. The public agency shall consider the information in the EIR along with other information which may be presented to the agency.

15151 Standards for Adequacy of an EIR. 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 the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

Plans for the project have proceeded to a degree sufficient to permit environmental analysis in conformance with CEQA. Accordingly, this EIR presents reasonable assumptions (as described in Chapter III, Project Description) about the overall types and levels of activities that the County could anticipate under the proposed project and describes their attendant environmental impacts. The analyses, where necessary, are based on conservative assumptions that tend to overstate project impacts. The EIR was prepared in accordance with current State, County and other applicable agency CEQA *Guidelines* and professional standards.

The *CEQA Guidelines*, Section 15382, define a significant effect on the environment as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within

the area affected by the project. . .” Therefore, in identifying the significant impacts of the project, this EIR concentrates on its substantial physical effects and upon mitigation measures to avoid, reduce, or otherwise alleviate those effects.

C. Range of Alternatives

CEQA requires that a reasonable range of alternatives be discussed in an EIR. This EIR identifies and analyzes such a reasonable range of alternatives; discusses the environmental effects of each alternative; and compares the environmental effects of each alternative with the environmental setting and with the project; and addresses the relationship of each alternative to the project objectives. The determinations of the County concerning the feasibility, acceptance, or rejection of each and all alternatives considered in this EIR will be addressed and resolved in the County’s findings when it considers approval of the project, as required by CEQA.

The alternatives consist of the following:

- 1) No Project Alternative consisting of 1A) a No Project - No Subsequent Development Alternative, and 1B) a No Project – Reasonably Foreseeable Development Alternative,
- 2) Alternative Haul Route / Contracted Sales Only Alternative
- 3) Reduced Production [(285,000 cubic yards (CY)) / Reduced Size (Phases 1 and 2 Footprint) Alternative

D. Use of the EIR

The EIR provides the environmental information and evaluation necessary for the planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the project. The EIR provides the CEQA compliance documentation upon which the County’s consideration of, and action on, all applicable land use permits and other approvals (collectively, “approvals”) shall be based. These include without limitation all those approvals set forth in this EIR, as well as any additional approvals necessary or useful to such planning, construction, operation and maintenance (e.g., any use permits, grading permits, and other development-related approvals).

E. Public Participation

The California Environmental Quality Act and the County of Sonoma encourage public participation in the planning and environmental review processes. Opportunities will be provided for the public to present comments and concerns regarding the CEQA and planning process through a CEQA public review and comment period and public hearings or meetings before the Sonoma County Planning Commission, and thereafter, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. Written public comments may be submitted to the County of Sonoma at any time during the public review and comment period, and written and spoken comments may be presented at the public hearings.

F. Organization of the Draft EIR

The Draft EIR begins with this Introduction (Chapter I), which provides an overview that describes the intended use and organization of this EIR, and sets forth some of the assumptions critical to the environmental analysis. The chapters following the Introduction are organized as follows:

Chapter II, Summary: The Summary summarizes the EIR by providing an overview of the project, the environmental impacts that would result from the project, the mitigation measures identified to reduce or eliminate these impacts, and the alternatives to the project.

Chapter III, Project Description, provides a description of the project site and location, the project goals and objectives, the project setting, the proposed project components, an outline of the approval process, and project construction and completion.

Chapter IV, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation: This chapter describes the existing setting, discusses the environmental impacts of the project, describes cumulative impacts, and identifies mitigation measures for the environmental impacts examined in the EIR. The issues addressed in the EIR are Land Use and Agricultural Resources; Geology, Soils and Seismicity; Hydrology and Water Quality; Biological Resources; Traffic and Circulation; Air Quality; Noise and Vibration; Hazardous Materials; Aesthetics; Public Services and Utilities; and Cultural Resources.

Chapter V, Alternatives: This chapter presents a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project, provides discussion of the environmental impacts associated with each alternative, compares the relative impacts of each alternative to those of the project, and discusses the relationship of the alternatives to the project objectives.

Chapter VI, Impact Overview: This chapter presents discussions of growth inducement, and summarizes discussions of cumulative impacts, unavoidable significant impacts, and effects found not to be significant.

Chapter VII, Report Preparation: This chapter lists report preparers and identifies persons and organizations consulted during report preparation (if any).

Appendices: The Appendices contain, the Notice of Preparation and a number of EIR technical supporting documents, including a Farmland Conversion Study.

References cited throughout this EIR are on file and available for public review at the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Avenue, in Santa Rosa, unless otherwise specified herein.

CHAPTER II

Summary

A. Project Description

The project applicant, North Bay Construction, Inc., proposes to develop a quarry (Roblar Road Quarry) in southern Sonoma County, approximately five miles west of the City of Cotati. The project applicant has requested the necessary entitlements from the County of Sonoma to enable development of the quarry. Approval of this request would grant a use permit for mining for a 20-year period, under the terms of the County's Aggregate Resource Management (ARM) Plan, mining regulations, and any approval conditions that are imposed. The proposed project would disturb approximately 70 acres (including a 65-acre quarry pit) of the approximate 199-acre parcel over a 20-year mining period. The Roblar Road Quarry proposes to mine approximately 570,000 cubic yards of quarry material annually (approximately 2,260 cubic yards per day). The County of Sonoma, serving as Lead Agency responsible for administering the environmental review for the proposed project, determined that preparation of an environmental impact report (EIR) is needed for the proposed project because it has the potential to cause significant effects on the environment.

B. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Potential environmental impacts of the project are summarized in Table II-1 at the end of this chapter. For each significant impact, the table indicates whether the impact would be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. Please refer to Chapter IV, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures, in this EIR for a complete discussion of each impact. As discussed in Chapter I, a reporting and monitoring program for all mitigation measures identified in this EIR would be prepared in accordance with the requirements of Public Resources Code Section 21081.

The proposed project, if implemented, could result in significant adverse environmental impacts. Mitigation measures proposed as part of the project, as well as measures identified by this EIR, would avoid or reduce most of the impacts to a less-than-significant level. The following significant adverse impacts would be unavoidable, even with the implementation of the mitigation measures proposed as part of the project and identified in this report:

- Impact A.1 – Effect of change in land use (introduction of active mining operations) on compatibility with residential land uses in the project vicinity.
- Impact E.8 – Potential secondary impacts from implementation of certain off-site transportation mitigation improvements.