



Quarry Agreement Enhances Environment

By Independent News

Two conservation groups and a mining company announced a historic cooperative conservation agreement for two quarry projects in the Sunol area — the Apperson Ridge Quarry and the Sunol Valley Quarry.

The Center for Biological Diversity and the Alameda Creek Alliance signed an agreement in December 2008 with Oliver de Silva, Inc. that will dramatically change the Apperson Quarry project, protect and enhance endangered species habitat, provide millions of dollars for fish-passage projects and restoration of Alameda Creek, secure habitat enhancements for tule elk, and address greenhouse gas emissions.

"This provides a rare, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to marry two projects and provide major environmental enhancements that would not be possible if we were not working together with the conservation groups," said Ed DeSilva, chairman of Oliver de Silva, Inc. The conservation agreement proposes changes to both quarry operations that, if approved by regulators, will dramatically reduce impacts to biological resources at Apperson Ridge. Quarrying at Apperson Ridge would be deferred until 2030 or cessation of operations at the Sunol Quarry site, whichever is later. Already approved processing plants to produce asphalt and concrete would be moved from Apperson Ridge to the Sunol Quarry site, which does not have habitat for special-status species. Material from Apperson Ridge would be transported for processing using a conveyor system, rather than an approved haul road, reducing road grading, truck traffic, and noise disturbance associated with the access road.

Jim Summers, vice president of Oliver de Silva, stated, "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. We worked hard with the environmental groups to come to an agreement."

The current permit to operate the Sunol Quarry runs through 2021. Summers said if an extension were approved, quarrying would continue through 2030. "No quarrying could take place at Apperson until all of the resources at Sunol were exhausted," he explained. Under the agreement, Oliver de Silva will fund and implement an Apperson Ridge Conservation Plan that will reduce potential impacts of the approved Apperson Quarry operation on native wildlife species and their habitats, provide mitigation for any environmental impacts, and permanently protect and enhance habitat for special-status species. Oliver de Silva will also fund a Sunol Quarry Conservation Plan that will assist in fish passage projects for steelhead trout and significantly advance the restoration of Alameda Creek.

"We are proud to announce conservation plans for the Apperson Ridge and Sunol Valley quarries that allow us to support both projects. We applaud Oliver de Silva's commitments to environmental protections and restoration efforts through these projects," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance.

Peter Galvin, conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity, stated, "These historic conservation plans will result in permanent protection of more than 600 acres of endangered species habitat and secure funding for reintroduction and enhancement of tule elk. This agreement is a good deal for wildlife and a boon for conservation and restoration projects in the area for the next half century."

The Apperson Quarry (Surface Mining Permit 17 or "SMP-17") is a hard-rock quarry approved by Alameda County in 1984, with a footprint of approximately 116 acres, located within a 680-acre leasehold on a private ranch east of the Sunol Valley.

The Sunol Valley Quarry ("SMP-30") is an existing gravel operation approved in the 1960s, on 325 acres of public land in the Sunol Valley, under lease from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. It is south of I-680.

One of the major mitigation measures in the agreement is replacement of habitat loss at Apperson Ridge through purchase and/or permanent protection of similar habitats on private land, at a replacement ratio of 3 to 1, and with a minimum parcel or parcels consisting of 600 acres protected. The plan provides mitigation for any loss of breeding habitat for several focal species at a 4 to 1 replacement ratio. Oliver de Silva will also initiate an incidental-take permit process under the Endangered Species Act, using a federal Habitat Conservation Plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agreement contains a comprehensive tule elk mitigation and monitoring plan, including \$250,000 in initial funding and up to \$250,000 annually when activity begins at Apperson Ridge, to enhance and protect elk habitat and establish a tule elk reserve in northern California.

Oliver de Silva will contribute several million dollars for fish passage projects to help restore steelhead trout to Alameda Creek, including funding fish ladders at the BART weir and inflatable rubber dams in the lower Alameda Creek flood-control channel, and a fish passage project at a PG&E gas pipeline crossing of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley. The company will also revegetate stream banks and restore more natural stream function to enhance habitat quality in the stream reaches adjacent to the Sunol Quarry, and contribute financial support for an SFPUC Sunol Valley Restoration Plan to stabilize and restore the entire Sunol Valley reach of Alameda Creek.

Oliver de Silva will also provide ongoing funding to the signatory conservation groups for efforts to protect wildlife and wild areas in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.