

A Mountain of Destruction

Mining continues at iconic Parvin Butte

Kim Metzler used to have a soothing view of wooded Parvin Butte from her rural home. Now when she walks outside, she sees and hears nothing but heavy machinery chewing away at the landmark butte. The flat-topped hill, elevation 1,193 feet, stands about 600 feet higher than the rural community of Dexter surrounding it, and can be seen from Highway 58 and by recreationists on the nearby reservoir.

Neighbors wonder just how tall the butte will stand once Lost Creek Rock Products (LCRP) is done turning it into a gravel mine, despite county fines and notices of violation for mining without a site review. Most recently the neighbors discovered the mine operators have applied for almost a half million dollars in state-funding aid in shipping the rock, called aggregate, from their iconic butte to the Oregon Coast.

Lost Creek has accrued nearly \$5,000 in fines for mining without a site review of as of Dec. 20, but Metzler says the mining hasn't stopped or slowed. The fines were \$330 a day earlier in December, but a more recent notice from Lane County to the mine operators increased the daily fines to \$1,170. The increase was due to factors such as "reckless or intentional acts," a lack of cooperation on the part of the mine operators and the violation being "repeated or continuous in nature." Lost Creek has appealed the violation and an administrative hearing has been scheduled for 2 pm Jan. 5 at Harris Hall.

The attorney for the mine operators, Bill Kloos, says he is not authorized to discuss the issue with *EW*.

Lost Creek Rock Products is a project of Greg Demers and Melvin and Norman McDougal. The men own large amounts of land in Lane County and elsewhere in the West that they buy, sell, develop, log and mine. Most recently their "quasi-municipal water source," Willamette Water Company, has been seeking to get a water right for 22-million gallons a day of water out of the McKenzie River, the same river that supplies Eugene with its water. WaterWatch of Oregon has been challenging the claim to the water.

LCRP has filed for a Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) ConnectOregon IV grant asking for \$477,286.40 of state money to build a "multimodal transfer facility in West Eugene on the Coos Bay Rail Link." The facility, which would be built on Green Hill Road, would be "primarily used to ship construction grade rock to the Oregon Coast" via rail. Metzler says she and other neighbors fighting to protect the butte were stunned and disheartened when they saw on the application that the rock for this project was slated to come from Parvin Butte.

What also shocked Metzler and the Parvin neighbors was finding that the application was accompanied by letters of support from Commissioner Faye Stewart and state Sen. Floyd Prozanski, both of whom had attended a public meeting last year between the mine operators and the concerned neighbors.



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As it turns out, when they wrote their letters, neither Stewart nor Prozanski were aware the Green Hill Road rail reload project was dependent upon the mining at Parvin Butte.

Prozanski says when he wrote his letter in November, "no information was given to me as to where the aggregate or gravel was coming from." He evaluated the project based on concerns including "what it will accomplish and jobs that will be created" and environmental issues. The Green Hill Road site, he says, is zoned industrial, without housing nearby, and had no opposition.

Similarly Stewart says when he wrote his letter — before LCRP began accruing fines for its mining without a site review, which is possibly in violation of its Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) permit — he, like Prozanski, was not given the full application that says the project will use gravel from Parvin Butte. He says he asked the owner "if the reload yard and the Parvin Butte rock quarry were projects that depended on each other due to the fact the rock quarry needed a site review to be used." Stewart says, "I was told that the reload site and the rock quarry were independent of each other."

Stewart says, "If I had seen the application before I wrote the support letter I would have declined sending a letter," and adds, "I don't support the application now that it has come to my attention the reload and rock quarry are linked together." He says he has called ODOT and let the agency know this, and Lane County's legal counsel was "contacting ODOT to let them know the quarry isn't permitted for use by Lane County."

Stewart says, "I have and will continue to work to make sure Lane County laws are followed and support staff's direction in issuing fines. I do support activities that have permits and are following the law."

Rick Little at ODOT says, "Any time ODOT offers a contract, including intergovernmental agreements, there is stipulation that the entity will follow all laws and rules. That's with ConnectOregon projects or any others."

Metzler says she and other neighbors are continuing to document ongoing mining at the butte. She says they have been asked by the county to come up with people willing to testify at the Jan. 5 hearing if need be.

As the mining continues, it is watched daily by members of the Dexter/ Lost Valley Community Association whose homes surround the butte. Mining rules require a 200-foot vegetative buffer, but LCRP clear-cut the butte right up to the property line, leaving no buffer, which is permissible under forestry rules.

LCRP has applied for a permit to build a bridge over Lost Creek, a salmon-bearing stream that runs across the property, to facilitate getting its truckloads of gravel to the highway. LCRP argued the bridge was for forestry, but the neighbors, who worry about effects on the creek, point out the butte has already been clear-cut and burned. A decision on the bridge is also expected from Lane County in January.

Despite the continued mining of the once-scenic butte, which neighbor Arlen Markus compares to mountain-top removal mining back East, the Parvin Butte neighbors are still fighting to save the landmark. "This has to stop somewhere," Metzler says.

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