

QUARRY GETS OK TO WIPE THE BUTTE

Lane County Commissioners approve gravel mine at butte in Oakridge, opponents file appeal

Lane County Board of Commissioners finished off 2018 by approving a forestland rezoning to allow a gravel mine. The rezoning will lead to developing a gravel quarry at TV Butte in Oakridge, called Old Hazeldell Quarry.

Opponents of the quarry say it would ruin Oakridge's landscape, cause environmental degradation and threaten quality of life for residents.

The history of the rezoning application, filed in 2015, has been filled with controversy. Despite citizen claims that the quarry could compromise environmental and archeological artifacts, commissioners approved the rezoning 4-1 with Pete Sorenson dissenting on Dec. 18.

Approval for the rezoning was one of the final decisions made by two outgoing conservative commissioners: Sid Leiken and Gary Williams.

The rezoning will be appealed to the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) again, says Kevin Matthews, a former candidate for Lane County Board of Commissioners and a self-identified free-range community advocate assisting opposition to the quarry in Oakridge.

The mine plans to extract 16.9 million tons of rock from about 46 acres, according to county documents. It will excavate andesite and tuft, which could be used for transportation infrastructure, says Phil Donovan, spokesperson for the quarry.

The quarry will excavate rock out of TV Butte for 30 to 50 years, he adds.

However, Matthews says that's just basing it off the application's estimates of how much rock is present in the butte.

The plan is still to blast off the top of the mountain and turn it into a pit until either there's no more rock or it's no longer economical to extract the rock, Matthew adds. The latter could happen as Oregon deals with climate change mitigation policies and alternative approaches to transportation.

"Right now you have peace and quiet, this mine would bring industrial disfigurement," he adds.

Rock from quarries can only be marketed within a radius ranging from 20 to 25 miles because it can be costly to transport heavy rock unless you have access to rail.

With the help of rail, there is some speculation that the rock could be used for the Jordan Cove LNG Pipeline, Matthews says.

If the LNG pipeline is approved, a gravel pit is needed to establish the pipeline in a tsunami zone to get it above flood level zone, he says.

Otherwise, there isn't much of a market for gravel in the Oakridge area, he adds, since the small town already has two mines.

Ed King of King Estate is one of the backers of Old Hazeldell Quarry. King contributed to four out of five commissioners' campaigns for the Lane County Board — those who voted in favor of the quarry — and to Sorenson's 2012 opponent, Andy Stahl. This includes \$5,000 contributions each to Bozievich, Leiken and Williams. Farr received \$1,000 in 2012.

Sorenson tells *Eugene Weekly* that it would be naïve to say that King's money didn't influence commissioner support for the rezoning.

Matthews says the Board of Commissioners should



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— KEVIN MATTHEWS

have waited on voting on the rezoning until Joe Berney and Heather Buch were sworn in.

"[Williams and Leiken] were voted out for their pro-extraction attitude, and they still got in a rubber stamp parting gift," he says. "Just trying to do the minimum wallpaper job to get Board of Commissioners to pass it again before the commission rolls over. Probably hope they wore down folks in Oakridge, so they couldn't afford another appeal."

The board's approval follows an appeal by activists to LUBA. Its findings didn't deter the board from approving the rezoning of the butte from forestland to mining. However, the board will recommend that the quarry site must follow a set of measures to address some of the concerns raised by LUBA.

One of those recommendations refers to wildlife. The board said at first there wasn't enough wildlife in the area to be affected by the rezoning and a quarry. However, LUBA challenged that statement. Now the board, relying on a testimony from a biologist affiliated with the applicant, stated that the quarry would not have any long-term effects on wildlife and would erect a sign to inform the presence of wildlife.

Donovan says elk will move wherever they want to go, adding that anyone with a fence knows that elk are resilient generalists that can make their home anywhere.

"There's a railroad and a shooting range," he adds. "That land is pretty utilized today, and there's elk around."

Matthews laughed when he heard about Donovan's comment.

"That's the attitude that you can go out in nature and wipe out anything and it won't make any difference," he says.

Matthews adds that TV Butte is a great piece of nature for the elk and the land is protected for the elk.

Matthew says the Save TV Butte campaign has submitted another LUBA appeal. The results of the appeal could take six to nine months for a decision to be made. The appeal's cost ranges from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Donovan says that the Old Hazeldell Quarry will be dedicated to the community if it is established. In fact, the company mailed a \$2,000 check to Oakridge High School so its girls basketball team could afford new home and away jerseys. ■

Save TV Butte is still running a GoFundMe to support its LUBA appeal. Visit gofundme.com/save-tv-butte for more information.