



Courtesy Save TV Butte

TV Butte Dispute Continues

CONTROVERSIAL EFFORTS TO REZONE FOREST LAND NEAR OAKRIDGE INTO A GRAVEL MINE CONTINUE, YEARS AFTER IT WAS FIRST PROPOSED

By Eve Weston

A mining company associated with Ed King of King Estate Winery is making another attempt to convert TV Butte, a forested area near the rural community of Oakridge, into a gravel mine.

The Lane County Planning Commission met Tuesday, June 18, to review the new application in a work session and public hearing. After a public hearing, the commission unanimously decided to postpone deliberations on the application's approval to a later date.

Old Hazeldell Quarry has submitted a new proposal in July 2023 to rezone two tax lots that are home to a sizable elk herd. King's Crown Properties LLC purchased the lots in 2006 from the Murphy Company, a local plywood supplier. The quarry submitted its first application for the rezoning of the lots in 2015.

The proposed site is located just east of Oakridge and north of Highway 58. The primary environmental concern is the possible impact on local wildlife. A herd of about 300 elk are known to frequent the area and could be significantly affected by mining. A disruption in habitat could cause stress and displacement, affecting the herd's long-term survival.

The site is so close to Oakridge that activists are concerned about noise and dust pollution. Noise from blasting, drilling, transport trucks and heavy machinery could affect not just wildlife but also the quality of life for Oakridge residents. Mine opponents say another concern is an old landfill on the site they say could leak pollutants.

Michelle Emmons, president of the Oakridge Westborough Chamber and director for the Oakridge Trails

Alliance, says a mine on TV Butte will negatively impact Oakridge's environment and wildlife.

"It's not like you're gonna just move a herd of adult elk from one point to another," she says. "It'd be difficult to program wildlife to different spaces."

Both tax lots are considered Goal 5 protected territory. Oregon's Goal 5 requires applicants to conduct environmental, social and economic consequence analyses before construction. The quarry must prove it will provide a significant aggregate resource to benefit the public and that its operations will not substantially disrupt wildlife.

"That's the stumbling block for Mr. King right now," says Robert Emmons of Land Watch Lane County, a local land-use nonprofit. Robert Emmons, no relation to Michelle Emmons, says the quarry's legal team will likely be able to navigate and overcome dust and noise pollution issues to push ahead with the quarry.

"Those are usually easily dealt with by the companies," Robert Emmons says, "They have set ways to respond to that stuff." In its application, the quarry says it will spray water during mining and transport to reduce dust. The quarry claims it will maintain a 50-foot natural land/vegetative screen to minimize operational noise.

The application says the quarry will be constructed in phases to allow local wildlife to adapt to changes gradually. The presence of big and peripheral game is what has prevented the application from making headway in the past. Peripheral game refers to wildlife that lives on the edges of primary game habitats and commonly ventures into those areas. The new application includes an assessment from Northwest Resource Solutions, an environmental consulting agency based in Roseburg.

In the Northwest Resource Solutions' environmental

assessment, wildlife biologist Jason Robinson writes that the combination of phased construction, noise mitigation and dust mitigation will effectively minimize the displacement of local wildlife in accordance with Goal 5 standards.

In an email to *Eugene Weekly*, quarry spokesperson Phil Donovan writes, "We're mindful that siting an environmentally safe quarry is an exhaustive process. We want to get this right and are willing to do the work required to respect the process."

The Lane County Board of Commissioners approved the quarry for the first time in 2016, but activists were able to prevent its approval through the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals. Since then, the mine has been embroiled in ongoing legal and environmental battles that have prevented its approval.

Five acres of land on the proposed mine was a landfill from 1951 to 1968. Michelle Emmons says the mine may disturb and leak pollutants from this old landfill. In its application, the quarry states it will maintain a 25-foot boundary from the landfill site.

"There are several photos and other documentation of toxic chemicals being buried there," says Michelle Emmons. The location of the old landfill is close to the proposed crusher site. A crusher breaks down large rocks into smaller aggregates.

"They have a crusher which is sending reverberation into the ground," Michelle Emmons says. "What effect is that going to have in sending toxic waste underground to the water table?"

The application will be reviewed for approval at the next Lane County Planning Commission meeting, July 2. Find out more about the efforts to fight the proposed mine by searching "Save TV Butte" on Facebook.

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