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Pechanga Sponsors Legislation to Protect Tribe's Place of Creation

Pechanga Indian Reservation, CA, August 4, 2011 – The Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians today announced it is sponsoring a bipartisan bill with more than 30 co-authors in the State Legislature to protect the mountain that is the very birthplace of creation for Pechanga and other Luiseño tribes from being blasted and excavated as a mine for the next 75 years.

Granite Construction Inc. is seeking Riverside County's approval of its Surface Mining Permit Application to develop the Liberty Quarry, which would be one of the largest open-pit hard rock mines in the United States generating 5 million tons of aggregate each year. Located just 500 yards from the Pechanga Indian Reservation, the Liberty Quarry would produce 270 million tons of aggregate by blasting a crater as wide as 117 football fields and as deep as the Empire State Building is tall less than ¼ of a mile from the heavily populated City of Temecula.

Upon reviewing Liberty Quarry's Draft Environmental Impact Report, the Pechanga Band determined the 414-acre project would cause irreparable and immitigable destruction to this place of creation. "Our Tribe participated in the environmental review process and took extraordinary and unprecedented steps to provide Riverside County with ethnographic and other evidence detailing the significance of this area to Pechanga," said Tribal Chairman Mark Macarro.

Granite's own ethnographic experts acknowledged the site as significant to the Tribe. Published in May 2009, the Ethnography Study noted, "...it is clear that much if not all of the Liberty Quarry project area... lies within a landscape that the Pechanga Tribe regards as spiritually significant...As such, this landscape is eligible for National Register of Historic Properties nomination as a TCP [Traditional Cultural Property] district."

County planning staff in March, however, wrote in the Final Environmental Impact Report "...the County respectfully disagrees with the Tribe's characterization of the area in and around the Project Site as a TCP" and found the devastating cultural impacts to be "less than significant" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

"That county planners deemed our Tribe's place of creation 'insignificant' under CEQA despite overwhelming and independent evidence to the contrary is disgraceful," said Tribal Chairman Macarro. "Because county planners have failed to honor the spirit of the law designed to protect such areas, we are forced to seek additional legislation to protect our place of creation from destruction."

(more)

Authored by Assembly Member Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, AB 742 would amend the Public Resources Code to include aggregate operations on the list of mining activities restricted near Native American sacred sites.

“I believe respecting one another’s religious beliefs is key to a healthy society,” said Lowenthal. “And there’s probably no better place to demonstrate this than on a mountain where some believe life itself began,” she said.

Scholars say that Káamalam Pomki is analogous to the Garden of Eden as the location of creation or to the Wailing Wall or Sistine Chapel in terms of spiritual significance.

“It is not an option to tell our future generations that their place of creation, the basis of their history and their very identity, *used* to be here,” said Macarro. “As any other People would, we will bring to bear all of the resources at our disposal to protect this sacred area from the permanent destruction this massive mine would cause.”

The controversial Liberty Quarry is also opposed by the City of Temecula, the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve that is immediately adjacent to the proposed area, thousands of residents, hundreds of businesses, more than 150 physicians that live and work in the Temecula Valley, Southern California Indian Tribes, and every federally recognized Luiseño Tribe.

Proponents of the Liberty Quarry argue that the mine will create a total of 99 jobs. However, the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College analyzed Granite’s economic impact report and found “these quarry jobs will be more than offset by job losses in tourism, real estate, construction, and agriculture.”

Calculating all of the benefits and the costs associated with the proposed Liberty Quarry, the Rose Institute estimates that “the quarry will reduce property values by \$540 million and cost the region an additional \$80 million *per year*” with an “estimated total *cumulative* net negative impact of \$3.6 billion to the region.”

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