



County of Lassen

Department of Planning and Building Services

- Planning
- Building Permits
- Code Enforcement
- Surveyor
- Surface Mining

April 28, 2021

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NOTICE OF PREPARATION
OF A DRAFT SUBSEQUENT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Zoning & Building
 Inspection Requests
 Phone: 530 257-5263

TO: Responsible and Trustee Agencies

FROM: Maurice Anderson, Director *[Signature]*
 Lassen County Department of Planning and Building Services
 707 Nevada Street, Suite 5
 Susanville, CA 96130

SUBJECT: EIR #2021-001, Ward Lake Pit Expansion

The County of Lassen will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Draft Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (DSEIR) for the proposed Ward Lake Pit Expansion project. This Notice of Preparation (NOP) has been prepared to solicit comments from interested agencies as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. When (and if) approved, your agency may need to use this SEIR when considering permits or other approvals for the project.

VESTA Resources, Inc. has prepared a Preliminary DSEIR, which includes a detailed project description, location map, and discussion of probable environmental impacts (attached). Additional documents, including the full Use Permit and Reclamation applications, are available upon request.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, responses to this NOP must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Please send written responses to Cortney Flather, Natural Resources Technician, Lassen County Department of Planning and Building Services, at the above address or via email to cflather@co.lassen.ca.us. Please provide a contact person for your agency in the written response.

This Notice of Preparation, attachments, and the project file are available for review at the Lassen County Department of Planning and Building Services, located at 707 Nevada Street, Susanville, CA 96130. The department is open from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, excepting holidays. These documents are also available on our website at www.lassencounty.org.

1.0 PROJECT LOCATION

The Ward Lake Quarry is located in Litchfield in Lassen County, California. The site lies on the southwest side of Shaffer Mountain. It is located approximately three miles east of Ward Lake and 13 miles east of Susanville, CA off of Ward Lake Road A.P.N.: 109-100-059-000 and 109-100-060-000. Access is by way of paved Ward Lake Road and paved Wells Drive, off Center Road (A-27).

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project is a proposal to expand mining operations at the Ward Lake Pit (CA mine ID #91-18-0008). If approved, the Use Permit would allow for an expansion of approximately 51 acres, an associated additional volume of 5,000,000 tons of material, an extension of the life of the mine from 2030 to 2050, and increase of maximum volume per year from 100,000 to 200,000 tons per year.

The Ward Lake Pit currently occupies 160 acres on a 442-acre parcel, owned by TLT Enterprises LLC. The surface mining operation is presently permitted for the mining of rock, crushing, screening, washing, material stockpiling, fuel storage; operation of a cement plant (12,000 cubic-yard annual limit) and asphalt plant; and the use of settling ponds, scales, an office, and a truck shop. The mine operates on a 24-hour schedule Monday through Saturday except from January 31 to March 31 every year (7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.).

Grading, excavating, and blasting are prohibited onsite between January 1 and March 31 annually, except in a state of emergency, as declared by the local Emergency Services Director and/or the Board of Supervisors and/or the City of Susanville. Annual site production in excess of the permitted 100,000 tons is allowable during declared emergencies. The current life of the mine is until 2030.

The detonation of explosives is prohibited between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. year-round. Current noise standards for the operation, as measured at the nearest affected residentially designated lands, require that daytime noise levels stay below 70 dBA and nighttime noise levels stay below 65 dBA (noise level standard varies with the cumulative number of minutes the noise lasts in any one-hour time period, see Lassen County Noise Element, Table III). The currently permitted activities and all associated conditions and restrictions serve as the baseline for review, as described in the Preliminary DSEIR. All existing ground disturbance associated with the mining operation was previously considered in an Environmental Document during the mines permitting process.

3.0 PROJECT SITE CHARACTERISTICS

The project area consists mainly of shrub communities, including sagebrush, bitterbrush, and rabbitbrush. Approximately 120 acres of the project site, out of 160 permitted acres, has been cleared of vegetation. The project area is considered important wintering range for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), and also serves resident chukar (*Alectoris chukar*). Special status wildlife species that are known to occur, or have the potential to occur, within the project area include the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), and white-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii townsendii*). Special status plant species that are known to occur, or have the potential to occur, within the project area include ornate dalea (*Dalea ornata*), spiny milkwort (*Polygala subspinoso*), and Susanville beardtongue (*Penstemon sudans*).

There are no existing streams or bodies of water within the boundaries of the project site, and the site is not within the 100-year floodplain. Several permitted settling ponds are located at the north end of the project site, which drain into intermittent channels. The project site is located within the Honey Lake Valley Groundwater Basin, which has been identified as a “low priority basin” by the Department of Water Resources, signifying that it is not currently at risk for overdraft. The area surrounding the site is primarily used for agriculture and open space. The nearest residence is approximately 470 feet from the west property line of the existing quarry and is also the closest residence to the expansion area being 4,600 feet to the south.

4.0 POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

VESTRA Resources, Inc. was hired by TLT Enterprises to oversee the Use Permit and CEQA process. VESTRA Inc. elected to forgo the Initial Study process, and instead prepared a Preliminary DSEIR, which was submitted with the Use Permit and Reclamation Plan Amendments. Pursuant to 15060 (d) of the CEQA Guidelines, Lassen County concurs that an EIR is clearly required for this project and will begin work directly on the EIR process. The Preliminary DSEIR prepared by VESTRA Resources Inc. identifies potentially significant impacts in the following categories:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Land Use and Planning

Mitigation measures have been proposed that may reduce some impacts to a less than significant level. However, Biological Resources could have significant and unavoidable impacts that cannot be mitigated to a level of less than significant (see the attached Preliminary DSEIR for more information).

This project poses potentially significant environmental effects, primarily due to the size of the expansion. Mitigation measures that have been identified to reduce these effects include covering trucks, filtering and containment of dust, dust suppression, good housekeeping, setting land aside from future development, buffer zones for sensitive flora/fauna, habitat enhancement, avoidance of cultural and tribal resources, avoidance of paleontological resources, consulting with archeologists/paleontologists if there are any unanticipated discoveries, and all operating conditions of approval for Use Permit #2018-003. A review of the Preliminary DSEIR is necessary to determine if the proposed mitigations are sufficient to reduce any of the above-mentioned impacts to a less than significant level.

MLA:clf

Distribution: Supervisor Hammond (5); Perry Thompson (Applicant); VESTRA Resources (Consultant); Co. Assessor's Office; County Counsel; Co. Fire Warden/CAL FIRE; Co. Environmental Health Dept.; Co. Public Works/Road Div.; Lassen Co. Fish & Game Com.; CA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (Redding/Wendel); Caltrans; Lahontan RWQCB (email); Department of Water Resources (DWR); Division of Mine Reclamation; Office of Historic Preservation; Department of Parks and Recreation; California Highway Patrol; Air Resources Board; Department of Toxic Substances Control; Native American Heritage Commission; State Lands Commission; Bureau of Land Management -Susanville; Pit River Tribe of California; Greenville Rancheria of Maidu Indians; Susanville Indian Rancheria; Honey Lake Maidu; Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California; Standish-Litchfield Fire Protection District; Co. Air Pollution Control Officer; Shaffer Elementary School