

## Rock company finally rolling

By Reggie Ellis

Foothill Sun-Gazette Wed., May 16, 2007

**Kaweah River Rock Co. filed for a permit to extend its mining operation on the Kaweah River Delta 21 years ago. When the Tulare County Board of Supervisors met on May 12, the company finally got its answer.**

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors tentatively approved plans to build a 280-acre sand and gravel mine along the St. John's River near Avenue 232 south of Woodlake with a 4-0 vote. Supervisor Mike Ennis abstained. The county has been reviewing a revised version of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) since a federal judge ruled in March of last year that the original EIR failed to address air and water quality concerns. The issue will be back on the agenda for the May 22 when final approval of the project is expected.

Tulare County Superior Court Judge Paul Vortmann ruled in March that Tulare County's environmental impact report (EIR) violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and ordered Tulare County to "vacate and remand" its approvals of KRRC's mining permit, EIR and Reclamation Plan for the project. Enacted in 1970, CEQA requires land use applicants to show mitigation measures for potential environmental impacts of a project. The lawsuit was filed by Valley Citizens for Water (VCW) - a group of local residents, property owners and business owners who were concerned about the affect the mine might have on well water levels, air quality and quality of life.

VCW was represented by Caroline Farrell, directing attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment's (CRPE) Delano Office. Farrell said Vortmann's decision ultimately came down to the EIR's insufficient data regarding emissions data and water depth data.

The lawsuit contended that the EIR violated CEQA by failing to analyze four main areas - direct air impacts, cumulative impacts, possible future concrete/asphalt plants and feasible mitigation measures. In his ruling, Vortmann said that the EIR failed to analyze air impacts because it made assumptions based on a comparison to an existing, adjacent project instead of comparing the project area's current use as ranch land.

"The County reasoned that the proposed mine will use more modern equipment than the existing mine. The County improperly compares this project to the existing gravel mine rather than what is currently happening at the proposed site."

Vortmann continued that the county did not provide any information on the types of equipment that will be modernized nor calculations proving that the equipment would result in a less than significant impact in air quality. The EIR also speculates that having a local source of aggregate would reduce air emissions by eliminating long truck hauls to import rock into the county. "However, the County does not provide any information documenting the actual air emission savings garnered from having a local source of aggregate ..." even though the document was signed off on by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) the quasi-governmental agency created to improve air quality in the Valley through programs, policies, rules and regulations.

Harrald said the primary revision of the EIR was a more in depth analysis of the air quality chapter. While the analysis was revised, the report reached the same conclusion.

"The best location for the project is the closest to the market," Harrald said. "The increased diesel emissions to haul rock over long distances is much higher than the direct effects of the operation itself."

Although there is potential to operate on 810 acres, the 280-acre project is all that is being applied for at this time. In other words, there is no guarantee that these facilities will ever be built or operated and if they are, will be reviewed during a new permit process. Future developments are only included in EIRs if they are required for the project to operate. "That is not even being proposed," Harrald said.

The quarry was under a time crunch to get a new permit as its aggregate supplies are dwindling. Harrald said the company was having difficulty keeping up with demand and that their supplies might have lasted another two years at the most. Prior to the decision, permitted aggregate reserves in the Visalia area were expected to run out by 2010, according to a 1997 report by the California Division of Mines and Geology. Historically, Harrald said Kaweah River Rock supplies about a third of Tulare County's aggregate. Harrald said the new mining permit should supply the county with aggregate for the next 20-30 years. That supply became more

critical this November when Tulare County residents approved Measure R, a half-cent sales tax increase earmarked for road construction and maintenance projects, that is planning to spend \$600 million over the next 30 years.

"I think Measure R made the need for future aggregate more apparent," Harrald said. "The needs of the future leap frogged ahead after the measure passed."

Kaweah River Rock began its quest for a new site in 1986 when it applied for a permit to mine 800 acres of the 815-acre Hannah Ranch property. The permit failed in a 3-2 vote in June 1999 after 13 years of hearings. The new permit for a 280-acre project was filed in 2003 and approved by the Planning Commission in January 2005. VCW appealed that decision to the Board of Supervisors, which approved the project in May 2006.

## **Save gas, take shuttle to big trees**

**By Nick McClellan, Staff writer**

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, May 17, 2007

A shuttle from Visalia to Sequoia National Park finally will hit the road May 23, just in time for Memorial Day weekend.

By making a reservation, park visitors will be able to travel from one of four locations in Visalia and two in Three Rivers to the Sequoia National Park Foothills Visitor Center and Giant Forest Museum.

The shuttle begins service with a test run May 23. An official launch event will be held at 9:30 a.m. May 24 at the Visalia Convention Center Plaza.

A round-trip ticket on the shuttle will cost \$10, which will include the park-entrance fee. The fee is normally \$20 a car.

"[We want to] lessen the impact of cars in the park, and we want to increase the number of people in the parks," said Monty Cox, transit manager for the city of Visalia.

Cox said that through Sept. 4, the Visalia shuttle will leave five times a day, from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., and a return shuttle will arrive five times a day, from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Reservations could effect departure times, and Cox said that timetables could change if the shuttle is not needed at a particular stop.

Sixteen seats will be available. Making a reservation on a specific shuttle — with departure and return times specified — is the only way to secure a spot, Cox said.

The shuttle will pick up passengers at the Holiday Inn at Plaza Park, the Lamp Litter Inn on Mineral King Avenue, the Visalia Convention Center and the Visalia Transit Center. Locations in Three Rivers include the Comfort Suites and the Veterans' Memorial Building.

Construction delays, which can delay drivers up to an hour during the week, should not hamper the Visalia shuttle.

Established travel times should bypass the construction, officials said.

"I think it will offer opportunities for those who might not otherwise come to the park," said Alexandra Picavet, public information officer for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks. "There are a lot of people in Visalia and [even] Exeter who have never been to the parks."

One goal of the shuttle she said: Get those who live less than an hour away to "come to see what's in their backyard."

In addition to the Visalia shuttle, two internal shuttles will begin ferrying visitors to popular destinations within the park. The internal shuttles are free to visitors and will run to popular locations such as the General Sherman Tree, the Lodgepole Visitor Center, Wuksachi Lodge, Moro Rock and Crescent Meadow.

"Visitors will be able to visit the Giant Forest in a much different way than many of them have chosen to do before," Picavet said. "Now they can park their vehicle, get on the shuttle, ride it to their farthest distance they want to walk from and then walk the trails."

The internal shuttles run as frequently as every 15 minutes from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. The shuttle to and from Wuksachi Lodge will be available every 30 minutes.

## **Port OKs biofuel plant**

### **Refinery will convert vegetable oil to burn in diesel engines**

By Jim Downing - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, May 17, 2007

The biofuel revolution has reached Sacramento.

The Port of Sacramento's governing board on Wednesday unanimously approved a proposal from Long Beach startup Primafuel Inc. to build a biodiesel plant that would make 60 million gallons a year of the alternative fuel.

Planned for 14 acres of port land along Industrial Boulevard in West Sacramento, the \$60 million to \$90 million facility would have nearly 10 times the production capacity of the largest existing biodiesel plant in California.

The plan must pass through state and local environmental reviews, which have frequently delayed biofuel projects elsewhere in the state. Permitting is expected to take at least six months, followed by up to 18 months for construction. The plant is expected to employ 70 workers.

West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon, who also sits on the port's five-member board, called the refinery an ideal green-industry anchor for the port and his city.

"One of our key issues is to use the port to achieve net reductions both in air pollution and greenhouse gases," Cabaldon said in an interview before the meeting.

A biodiesel plant, he said, meets those emissions objectives in two ways: by generating little pollution of its own and by producing a clean-burning fuel.

As designed, the refinery would emit less smog-forming pollution than a typical gas station, said Paul Hensleigh, deputy air pollution control officer at the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District. The facility would convert vegetable oil, most of it imported from other states and countries, into an alternative diesel fuel that produces lower net emissions of most air pollutants as well as climate-warming carbon dioxide than does conventional diesel.

"Its own direct (pollution) output is extremely low. And its net impact is extremely high," Hensleigh said.

Cabaldon said he does not anticipate significant local opposition.

"This is the kind of project that folks from the community and around the port have been suggesting that we move to," he said.

The Primafuel project represents the first new industrial client at the small port since it completed a major restructuring late last year, which included an alliance with the Port of Oakland.

Port Manager Mike Luken said his office received unsolicited proposals from six different biodiesel startup companies beginning last fall. After a formal review, port staff selected Primafuel Inc., which was founded in 2005 by a small group of renewable-energy veterans.

Primafuel Executive Vice President Rahul Iyer said financing for the Port of Sacramento project is in place.

Iyer said the West Sacramento site was attractive because of the port's access to rail, truck and sea transport, as well as its proximity to agricultural land, a large potential customer base in Sacramento and Northern California's booming green technology sector.

Nationwide biodiesel production in 2006 was 250 million gallons. By contrast, Americans burn about 60 billion gallons of petroleum diesel and 140 billion gallons of gasoline each year.

Biodiesel production capacity is growing rapidly in the United States and abroad. But there is substantial uncertainty about the future global availability of plant oils to feed the new refineries.

Iyer said Primafuel plans to work with Sacramento-area farmers to integrate oilseed crop production into their operations. The company hopes to initially draw about 5 percent of the refinery's feedstock from local farmers. Because California's soil and climate support many high-value crops, the state's farmers raise little of the relatively low-value crops used to produce vegetable oils.

While biodiesel will burn in any diesel engine, it's not available for retail sale -- unless diluted with four parts petroleum diesel -- because the federal government has yet to approve standards for it.

In the Sacramento region, a network of co-ops distributes biodiesel to consumers. Some fuel wholesalers also supply biodiesel blends to bus, truck and heavy equipment fleets.

Diesel cars have long been banned from California showrooms for their polluting emissions, but they are set to make a comeback. At least six automakers plan to release California-ready diesel models, some as soon as the 2008 model year.

## **Berkeley to start climate campaign**

### **Saturday kickoff will offer tips on cutting greenhouse emissions**

By Kristin Bender, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, May 17, 2007

BERKELEY - During a five-year period, the city reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 9 percent - the equivalent of taking more than 12,000 medium-sized cars off the roads.

But with a voter-mandated directive to reduce greenhouse gases by 80 percent by 2050, Berkeley has a long way to go toward its goal.

Six months after 81 percent of voters approved Measure G, a greenhouse gas emission initiative, the big question in Berkeley is "Now what?"

"I don't think anybody can say that we know exactly how we can get to an 80 percent reduction," said Cisco DeVries, the mayor's chief of staff, who is working on the city's greenhouse gas reduction efforts.

But the city is off to a solid start.

"The 9 percent is hopeful and it shows that people care about this issue and are already making choices to reduce their energy use. It's great to have success to build on, but we have a long way to go."

Between 10 a.m. and noon Saturday at the Ashby Stage, the city will kick off its greenhouse gas reduction campaign. The event, which is free and open to the public, will give participants:

- Ideas and tips on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Ideas on free and reduced price services that can help reduce energy use and driving.
- Ideas on putting solar panels on every roof and doubling the number of people walking, biking or taking public transit to work and school.

"This isn't a lecture about turning off your lights when you leave the room," city spokeswoman Mary Kay Clunies-Ross said. "It's the beginning of a conversation that involves all of us."

According to a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it is 90 percent likely that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from human activities have been the main causes of global warming in the past 50 years.

City leaders hope to have a plan with specific targets for reduction in Berkeley by the end of 2007.

The kickoff comes as Berkeley has released an analysis of emissions from electricity, natural gas and transportation from residents and businesses showing a 61,000-ton reduction (or nearly 9 percent) in annual carbon emissions over five years.

The emissions study was done by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives by collecting and analyzing data from PG&E, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the city and other sources to determine emissions relating to all electricity, natural gas and transportation in the city.

City leaders say the decrease is among the largest any city has documented in the United States and puts Berkeley on a path to meet its goals under Measure G.

Berkeley ranks with Portland, San Francisco, San Diego, Cambridge, Mass., and Austin, Texas, in efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, said Timothy Burroughs, the city's climate action coordinator.

Specifically, commercial and residential emissions both fell by more than 13 percent while electricity use dropped by 12 percent and natural gas use fell by 14 percent. Transportation emissions dipped by 2.7 percent.

City leaders credit the 2000-01 energy crisis, a Smart Lights program funded by PG&E and people buying more efficient hot water heaters for at least part of the reduction.

Mayor Tom Bates, who recycles everything, even coffee filters, walks to City Hall at least three days a week and owns a hybrid car with his wife, said the goal is to reduce greenhouse gases throughout the city by at least 2 percent annually. "For some people it will be easy, for some it will be more difficult," Bates said.

For more information about Saturday's event or to R.S.V.P., call (510) 981-5437 or e-mail [measurereg@ci.berkeley.ca.us](mailto:measurereg@ci.berkeley.ca.us). The Ashby Stage is at 1901 Ashby Ave., in Berkeley.

## **Planting a seed for more city tree funding**

### **Many council members say finding money is a priority**

By ADAM ASHTON

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 17, 2007

Modesto's acclaimed urban forest is thinning, and some fear it won't revive without a significant boost in city funding.

Tree planting, mistletoe abatement and pruning have withered over the past four years as city leaders have sought to balance Modesto's budget.

Those cuts are starting to show in the canopy above Modesto's older neighborhoods. They lack 3,622 trees that have been removed since the city stopped funding for replanting in late 2003.

"It's definitely at a tipping point," said Chuck Gilstrap, a retired city forestry superintendent who often urges elected officials to increase funding for public trees.

"A forest is like anything else. It has to be maintained," Gilstrap said.

Modesto's Community Forestry Division has 25 employees, down from 41 in 1991.

Bill Dufresne, the division's superintendent, last week asked the council to consider hiring for three full-time positions and one part-time spot over the next year. Doing so would allow the city to begin replacing trees.

Ultimately, Dufresne said he wants a staff of 36 to keep city trees healthy.

He said the city needs at least one more tree trimmer to move its mistletoe pruning schedule to four-year cycles instead of five-year intervals. The lower number would provide more assurance that mistletoe won't spread, he said.

The city's budget proposal for the 2007-08 budget year, which is expected to be adopted June 5, does not call for an increase in forestry workers.

However, several council members say finding money to replenish Modesto's trees is a priority.

"Obviously, we've got to try to give them some more manpower and more equipment," Councilman Will O'Bryant said. "It's very important. We can't let it go too much longer."

In April, the National Arbor Day Foundation named Modesto a "Tree City USA" for the 26th consecutive year. O'Bryant implied that title could be at risk if the city doesn't restore its forestry funds.

"We just have to make a decision. Do we want to be a tree city or not?" he asked. "I think we need to keep that because trees are beautiful. It's good for the environment, and there's nothing wrong with having a lot of trees."

Funding could be tight in pending budget negotiations, partly because sales tax revenue and the money the city garners through construction fees are coming in below expectations.

Without additional forestry funding, newer neighborhoods where residents pay special taxes for tree maintenance would continue to benefit from fresh plantings, Dufresne said. Those areas tend to be in the Village I developments.

It's the rest of the city that's falling behind, Dufresne said.

"It's noticeable to me when I picture in my mind the holes in the canopy, and knowing that we should start to replace those we've taken out," he said.

Gilstrap sees the trimmed forestry funds as a threat to an investment the city made over decades.

A 1999 study of Modesto's trees said the return on that investment showed in \$4.95 million in benefits from the \$2.4 million the city spent on its trees that year. The study traced lower energy costs and the absorption of pollution by city trees.

"For the everyday citizen, it has to almost get to a crisis for them to see it," Gilstrap said. "We're almost to that point."

## **Air Quality Concerns Beijing Olympics**

By Justin Pritchard, Associated Press Writer

NY Times, LA Daily News and Contra Costa Times, Thursday, May 17, 2007

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) -- Air quality remains a major concern for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a top official organizing China's first Games said Wednesday.

Factories belching pollution as they fuel breakneck economic growth and dust blowing from thousands of local work sites and western deserts frequently brown the sky over China's capital.

While pollution controls are having an effect -- Beijing experienced 241 "good air quality days" last year, up from 100 in 1998 -- there's room for progress, said Wang Wei, secretary general of the Games' organizing committee.

"We want to make sure the athletes have the best air quality," Wang, who is visiting the United States for four days, told a conference sponsored by Asia Society Southern California.

In a subsequent interview, Wang dismissed criticism of China's human rights record as "an old topic."

Critics of China's authoritarian government hope to swing the Olympic spotlight to human rights, environmental blight and other areas where Beijing promised reforms before it won these Games in 2001. Wang told reporters at that time he thought the Games could "promote" human rights.

"I think that human rights conditions keep improving in China," Wang told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "And I think this is going to be a good thing for the general social progress including human rights, that's no problem."

A report last month from Amnesty International echoed the refrain that China is limiting freedom of political dissidents, human rights activists and adherents of the Falun Gong faith. The Olympics, Amnesty concluded, are actually prompting a crackdown, including sweeps of petty criminals and vagrants considered a potential blemish on the Games' happy face.

The Games, which begin Aug. 8, 2008, represent a coming out party for a nation that has turned decades of stagnation into a staggering resurgence.

An estimated 500,000 foreign visitors are expected to cram Beijing and billions more will visit China through television coverage.

For the hosts, it's a chance to showcase a nation that's becoming a dominant economy and a political player.

With its long view of history, China sees itself returning to an accustomed role as a world power. The nation also has been investing heavily in athletics -- a golden haul of medals, after all, is a matter of national pride.

China has become an international athletics powerhouse.

Wang promised foreign reporters who will flock to China will be free to roam the country to cover not just sports but social problems created by the nation's vast wealth gap and failings of the central government to alleviate corruption and rural poverty.

"The world does not really know as much about China as we wish," Wang said.

He also promised a well-mannered host city -- as he put it a "sound social atmosphere" that visitors sometimes have found lacking in years past.

He cited public education campaigns on standing in line, and not spitting or littering.

There's also a campaign to educate Chinese about how to watch sports they may not know well. Do not clap or yell, Wang pointed out, when someone is about to shoot a rifle.

## **Beijing Vows Cleaner, Stable City for Olympics**

By REUTERS

NY Times, Thursday, May 17, 2007

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's capital faces a host of problems preparing for the 2008 Olympic Games, but its top official pledged on Thursday the city would be stable, cleaner and more civilized.

"From beginning to end, stability must be our number one political task," Beijing's Communist Party boss, Liu Qi, who outranks the mayor, told more than 730 delegates at the opening of the city's party congress, held once every five years.

The party, which has monopolized power since the 1949 revolution, is obsessed with stability and has no qualms about crushing open challenges to its rule or silencing dissent.

Beijing hopes to maintain peace and order by "dealing a blow to criminal activities in accordance with the law," he said.

But Liu also said the society would be more "harmonious" -- a watchword coined by national party chief Hu Jintao -- because channels for people to air their grievances were more open.

The government would step up audits to curb corruption and ensure the Olympics are clean and frugal, Liu said.

No personnel changes were announced on the first day of the six-day congress. Sources with ties to the leadership have told Reuters that Mayor Wang Qishan is tipped to be named party boss of the booming southern province of Guangdong ahead of a national party congress in the autumn.

The government will endeavor to increase per capita GDP of Beijing residents to \$10,000 from \$6,000 over the next five years, Liu said, adding that the pace of Beijing's "urbanization, marketization, internationalization and modernization" would be accelerated.

"The task of maintaining social equity is increasingly difficult," Liu said, referring to a widening wealth gap which has spawned protests nationwide.

The economic boom has come at a price, making Beijing one of the world's most polluted cities. The capital is regularly blanketed in thick smog despite government efforts to improve air quality.

Liu promised to reduce emissions of pollutants and meet the national target by 2010.

Beijing has said it would close coal mines, move power stations and relocate chemical factories and other heavy polluters including the further dismantling of the city's Shougang steelworks, in a bid to meet environmental targets.

The city is also trying to reduce the fumes from coal burned for heating but there is now the problem of the nearly three million cars in the capital -- a tally increasing by 1,110 a day.

Beijing's notoriously congested streets are a concern. The city is hoping a 100 billion yuan (\$13 billion) investment in public transport will be enough to keep the traffic flowing during the Games.

An International Olympic Committee inspection team visited Beijing in April and wanted more details of contingency plans to improve air quality and the traffic flow.

Liu said Beijing still lagged behind the world's modern cities in terms of civility.

The government has concentrated its efforts on stamping out spitting, littering and queue-jumping in an attempt to present a modern, civilized city to the world in August next year.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 17, 2007:](#)

### **High stakes on air**

Many thanks to The Bee for the front-page story May 13, "Federal, state aid vital for Valley air cleanup plan." This article helped me understand the relatively small role the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District plays in the condition of our air.

This agency does not have jurisdiction over vehicles, including the old, belching big rigs and other trucks, so numerous on our roadways. By and large, these and all other vehicles are the most significant factor in our air quality problems.

As we come upon yet another dreaded season of dense smog and through-the-roof ozone levels, maybe it's high time we start demanding more from our legislators. Let's make sure they know that we want action, starting today. Call the governor and your state and federal representatives now. Tell them the ball is in their court and the stakes are far too high for the Valley to lose this game.

*Cynthia Koval, Visalia*

### **Potential for clean air**

Peter E. Weber's commentary May 8 explaining why the local air district's "dual path" to clean air could not be officially folded into a legally binding plan showing earlier attainment of federal standards contains misleading information. Mr. Weber asserts that "We do not have the technology today to completely close the gap." There is such a technology and it's called selective catalytic reduction (SCR).

The Europeans have taken this technology path to meet very strict nitrogen oxide (NOx) standards for their mobile fleets. There are many demonstration projects in the United States that show the viability of SCRs. In Texas, a wide-ranging study that compared the actual performance of emission control technologies revealed that SCRs could lower NOx emissions from diesel trucks by as much as 80%.

This is not new information. SCRs were brought to the district's attention officially by the International Sustainable Systems Research Center (ISSRC). Unfortunately, the local air district chose to discredit ISSRC's proposals with inaccuracies, such as the assertion that there are no "practicable" current technologies. An earlier attainment date would have been possible, had the district chosen to fully evaluate the potential of the SCR technology.

*Alvin Valeriano, Fresno*