

## **Fresno County planners reject Jesse Morrow mining project**

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

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Fresno County planning commissioners Wednesday sided with emotional opponents of rock mining at Jesse Morrow Mountain, surprising many who watched a four-hour debate over the project.

In a 4-3 vote, the commission turned thumbs down to the proposal from multinational cement company Cemex, which wants to dig rock from the Sierra foothill and crush it for ready-mix concrete.

The company will appeal the decision to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors later this year. Supervisors could still approve the quarry, which would produce rock for construction over the next half century. There is no date set for the hearing.

But about 100 stunned opponents of the project cheered and hugged each other over their victory Wednesday. They have been battling the mining proposal for more than a decade.

"Wow," said Jim Van Haun, owner of Cedar View Winery and Sierra View Bed and Breakfast at the foot of Jesse Morrow Mountain. "I'm impressed. They did the right thing for their constituents."

The hearing was a continuation of a February commission meeting on the proposal that left too many questions unanswered, commissioners said. The questions centered on air pollution, traffic, sacred land of American Indians and the view of a well-known foothill on the route to Kings Canyon National Park.

Cemex defended its proposal, saying there is not enough construction aggregate to supply the region's needs over the next 50 years. Lawyer Pat Mitchell, a company spokesman, said the foothill, 20 miles east of Fresno, would provide jobs and a source close enough to keep down the price of the aggregate.

Mitchell emphasized that production on the project had been downsized by 25% earlier this year to ease local concerns. The plan is to mine 100 acres on an 824-acre plot.

After the Planning Commission's seven-hour February meeting, Cemex tweaked its environmental documents to address several issues, including air pollution, groundwater and traffic.

The county planning staff last week announced the changes and recommended approving the documents and the permit for Cemex.

But about 30 opponents -- area residents and others -- passionately voiced their continuing doubts on Wednesday.

"This is a scenic highway and sacred ground," said Michael Becker, who teaches political science at Fresno State. "There is cultural significance to this mountain. There are issues over the environment and the traffic."

Lawyer Marsha Burch, representing Friends of Jesse Morrow Mountain, made the case that commissioners should consider postponing a vote until the public had a better look at the changes in Cemex's environmental documents.

But commissioners didn't delay a vote. Commissioner Chris Mendes said there were still too many unresolved issues in his mind, particularly the possible impact on the view.

"I can't support this," he said before making the motion to reject the Cemex project.

Planning commissioners Glenn Niswander, Randy Rocca and Ross Borba agreed. Commissioners Barbara Ferguson, A.J. Yates and Chuck Riojas voted against Mendes' motion.

Cemex spokeswoman Sara Engdahl said the company is disappointed but would take the project to the next level: "We are confident that the Board of Supervisors will recognize the importance of this project to Fresno County and the state of California."

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, May 31, 2012:](#)

## **Haze doesn't equate to ozone pollution in summer**

By Mark Grossi

Don't let Central California's cruddy haze fool you in summer. Haze does not equal summertime ozone pollution.

An Associated Press story this week about bad air in Sequoia National Park left that distinct impression, and it misleads people into thinking a hazy day is a high-ozone day.

I know because I've done the same thing to readers. My apologies.

Haze is basically created by particle pollution -- microscopic dust, soot, droplets of moisture, chemicals and other debris. It's more dangerous than ozone, medical researchers say, because the tiniest particles can pass through the body's defenses to trigger lung and heart problems.

Ozone is bluish in color, experts say, but I've never been able to spot it. It's invisible, as far as I'm concerned.

In Sequoia, ozone mostly comes from gases drifting up from the Valley's cars, trucks, farms and industries. When it's hazy, ozone can be a part of the haze.

So here's the problem. Readers have told me they don't worry about ozone when the sky is less hazy. They think a heavy dose of the haze means ozone. Unfortunately, the air could be filled with ozone pollution on a warm, still day with just a little haze or none at all.

Please, take note of the messages and warnings in the visitors center at national parks. Check the forecast and the hourly readings with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. And I'll avoid using the term smog, unless I explain it.

And there's one other thing about the AP story. It says Sequoia is the most polluted national park.

Actually, last year it had more ozone violations than any other place in the country -- including Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Bakersfield, Fresno, Houston and Atlanta. None of those well-known smog traps was worse than Sequoia National Park. I broke that story last fall, and I still find it astounding.