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October 5, 2021

Amador County Planning Department (Sent by email)
810 Court Street
Jackson, CA 95642

RE: Response to Notice of Preparation of a DEIR for the SGI Mine Expansion Permit

Dear Director Beatty,

My name is Tom Infusino, and I am presenting these comments on behalf of Foothill Conservancy and Friends of Greater Ione. Thank you for the opportunity to suggest potentially significant impacts that should be evaluated in the upcoming environmental impact report. Please consider the adopting the potentially feasible mitigation measures and the alternative we propose. **Please consider working with us and the applicant to craft accommodations that could be included in the approval of the project.**

As you know, Foothill Conservancy is a non-profit organization with a mission to protect, restore, and sustain the natural and human environment in Amador and Calaveras counties for the benefit of current and future generations. The organization's core values include supporting sustainable community based solutions that promote economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental protection. The organization values transparent government decision making based upon facts, science, and the law.

Friends of Greater Ione is an association of people residing and/or working in the City of Ione or on the unincorporated lands outside of the city. They seek to protect the area from threats to the groundwater supply of local ranches, threats to the health of local children and elders, and threats to their rural and small-town quality of life. They seek to secure conditions and mitigation measures on future projects approved by Amador County and the City of Ione.

A) Background and Project Description

According to the project description provided with the application, the quarry has operated on the site for 31 years. The proposed expansion would dramatically increase the scope of the project in space and time. The proposed project would expand the surface area disturbed by the mining (from 155 acres to 290 acres), the depth of mine (from 325 msl down to 280 msl), the area covered by stockpiles (from 36 to 86 acres) and the height of the stockpiles (from 70 feet to 200 feet). It would also extend the operation 100 years (from 2075 to 2175). No increase in the rate of annual production is proposed. To accomplish this expansion requires an amendment to

both the Conditional Use Permit and the Reclamation Plan. (The granules plant is operated under a separate CUP and is not part of this project.)

The project is accessed from Highway 104. The current quarry is about 125 feet deep. The current stockpiles are 60-70 feet high. Zoning for the site and surrounding lands is Single Family Residential and Agriculture (R1-A). Surrounding lands are suitable for residences, growing crops, and grazing livestock, and many are so used.

Over the next 154 years, the mine could continue to be operated 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, removing about 158 million tons of overburden topsoil, cap rock, and hard rock. Blasting could continue Monday – Saturday, 9 am-6 pm, up to 80 times per year. The mine would continue to use groundwater. Annual production would be about 600,000 tons of material per year.

When “reclaimed”, the benches and high walls of the quarry will not be revegetated, and the quarry will only partially fill with water up to 105 msl. That is, it will look like a hole over 250 feet deep with water at the bottom immediately adjacent to a 200 foot high revegetated stockpile mountain.

The biggest problem with the proposal is that the requested additional permit duration begins more than 50 years from now and then extends for another century. This makes meaningful environmental review and impact mitigation nearly impossible. Predicting the environmental conditions a century and a half from now is not feasible. Others in the industry seek permit extensions nearer to the expiration of their existing permit, and then only for an additional 30 years. (See Project Description sections in Exhibits 1 - Pacifica Rock Quarry Expansion Project DEIR, Exhibit 2 - Boca Quarry Expansion Project RDEIR.) This allows for meaningful environmental review and impact mitigation. If another extension is needed in 30 years, then that extension can be properly considered by that Board of Supervisors in light of the environmental conditions at the time, and state-of-the-art impact mitigation technologies. We strongly encourage the County **not** to extend the existing permit duration for the SGI Mine which already lasts through 2075. If the County is intent on providing the extension, then mechanisms need to be put in place for periodic re-assessment of impacts, mitigation measures and permit conditions, to ensure that state-of-the-art measures remain in place to protect the health, safety, and well-being of local residents and project employees.

B) Potentially Significant Impacts to evaluate in the Draft EIR.

Attachment A is an initial study checklist identifying potentially significant impacts for evaluation in the upcoming draft environmental impact report for the proposed mine expansion. It suggests that the project may have significant impacts to agriculture, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, greenhouse gas emission, hazardous materials, hydrology, land use planning, mineral resources, noise, housing, public services, transportation, tribal cultural resources, and utilities. **Exhibits 1 and 2** are EIRs on quarries that may help you with your evaluation of these impacts. **Attachment J** provides information on health effects of exposure to silica and roofing granules. Please assess such health effects in the DEIR. We also incorporate by reference into the administrative record the groundwater shortage information,

and the information demonstrating a lack of available treated surface water, provided to the County by commenters on the Edwin Lands rezoning in 2020. Please use this information in assessing the water supply impacts of the proposed project.

C) Basic CEQA Requirements for a Project EIR.

In **Attachment B**, we explain the basic requirements for a project-level environmental impact report, and note some potential pitfalls to avoid when preparing a draft EIR. Please take these requirements to heart when completing the draft EIR for the proposed mine expansion project. This will help the County to make a transparent decision that is based upon facts, science, and the law. Please ensure that impact evaluations and mitigation measures for biological resources conform to Amador County Code, Section 19.50.040.

D) Mitigation Measures and Alternatives

We strongly encourage the County and the applicant to consider mitigation measures and conditions of approval to make this project economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable over the next few decades. For the County's consideration our attachments and exhibits provide samples of permit conditions, mitigation measures and monitoring requirements implemented in other mines in California. (See Attachments E and F, and Exhibits 1 and 2.) **Attachments C, D and I** we provide an alternative for the project applicant to consider and for the County to evaluate in the EIR to reduce potentially significant impacts. **We are available to discuss the conditions, mitigation measures, and the alternative with the applicant and the County.**

In the past the County has ignored our comments, our proposed mitigation measures, and our project alternatives. This has resulted in litigation. That was the result with the 2016 General Plan and the 2020 Edwin Lands rezone. As you may know, litigation is not uncommon for mining projects throughout California. Instead of repeating old and inefficient habits, we encourage the applicant and the County to work with us to craft acceptable accommodations that can be incorporated into the upcoming project approval.

E) Permit Conditions must protect the health, safety, and well-being.

In addition to CEQA, the County has other legal authority and responsibilities related to the proposed project. The County locally administers the state's Surface Mining and Reclamation Act. Also, the County has Conditional Use Permit authority under the Zoning Code. These laws and regulations both provide the County with the authority, and impose upon the County the affirmative duty, to place conditions on the project when necessary to protect public health, safety, and well-being, and to conserve resources. Such conditions may be necessary even when the EIR finds the impact insignificant. For the County's consideration **Attachment E** is an example of permit conditions implemented at another quarry in California.

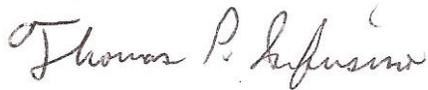
F) General Plan Consistency

Finally, as with any discretionary project approval, the proposed project must be consistent with the 2016 General Plan. **Attachment H** identifies questions that must be answered by the County,

with the support of evidence in the record, to make a valid finding that the proposed mine expansion is consistent with the 2016 General Plan.

Please consider working with us and the applicant to craft accommodations that could be included in the approval of the project.

Sincerely,



Thomas P. Infusino, for
Foothill Conservancy and FOGI

cc. SGI

Attachment A – CEQA Checklist for SGI Expansion

Attachment B - Basic CEQA Requirements for a Project EIR

Attachment C - Alternative

Attachment D – Fraser West Park Overview

Attachment E: San Rafael Rock Quarry Permit, Mitigation & Monitoring. This provides a good example of mitigating and monitoring impacts from nighttime operations, truck trips, diesel emissions, cultural resources, lake water quality, and dust from high winds.

Attachment F: San Rafael Rock Quarry Mitigation Monitoring Table. This is a good example of a table listing the timing and responsibility for monitoring and reporting on mitigation measure implementation.

Attachment G - Bay Area Air Quality Management District CEQA Air Quality Guidelines.

Attachment H: General Plan Consistency

Attachment I – Colonel Fraser E. West Bio

Attachment J – Material Safety Data Sheet re. Roofing Granules & Silicosis Information

Exhibit 1: Pacific Rock Quarry Expansion Project DEIR. This provides examples of evaluating mining impacts associated with aesthetics, agriculture, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards, water and hydrology, land use, soils and minerals, noise and vibration, and transportation.

(https://docs.vcrma.org/images/pdf/planning/ceqa/eir/12-01-2020_LU10-0003_DEIR.pdf)

Exhibit 2: Boca Quarry Expansion Project Recirculated DEIR. This provides examples of evaluating mining impacts related to aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural

resources, energy, greenhouse gas emission, hazards, water and hydrology, minerals and soils, noise, and transportation.

(https://files.ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/72153-3/attachment/NXngCMFnIRJGk2MxYjarjo8_ORR1jNJRzSOOgCxQI9TgN_dYemCt6EqR34_sRTqzjkbYUbxCZKinjjqd0)