



## CEMEX Wants to Mine for 100 Years at the San Joaquin River

The CEMEX company has been mining gravel next to the San Joaquin River for many years with a permit issued by the County of Fresno. The permit ends soon, and CEMEX is applying for a century-long extension to mine by the river and expand its operation upstream including blasting a 600-foot-deep pit there.

A century-and-a-half ago, California lands were distributed to private owners, including many parcels of land along the San Joaquin River, which those owners could buy and sell. CEMEX, a foreign (Mexican) corporation, is a beneficiary of that distribution.

Thirty-seven years ago, the state government determined that the banks of the waterways of the state should belong to all citizens for the recreation, renewal and preservation of their complex, riparian ecological communities, establishing the San Joaquin Parkway and Conservation Trust. This purchase area is the part of the San Joaquin River not diverted to agriculture by Friant Dam and the federal Central Valley Project (a water-management system that brought an end to the river's huge annual salmon run).

CEMEX's gravel operation interrupts this. A new permit would be a nuisance and a threat to health, near housing developments, with more houses planned, from the following:

- Blasting the 600-foot-deep pit would be loud.
- Dust of loading and sorting gravel and diesel exhaust would add ozone and PM10 air pollution to our air basin's non-attainment for these.
- Heavy traffic of heavy trucks would share the road with passenger cars, risking collisions and falling windshield-cracking rock.
- Noxious gases would leak from heating asphaltic concrete.

There is no need for gravel from the riverbank as a statewide survey has determined that Fresno County has more rock available for gravel compared to expected needs than many other counties. The Vulcan Company already supplies gravel in less sensitive areas.

The San Joaquin Parkway and Conservation Trust is gradually purchasing private land along the river. Part of the completion of the Trust's goal

will be denial of CEMEX's application for a permit to continue and expand gravel mining.

In a democracy, the voice of the people can express refusal to accept oppressive conditions such as the CEMEX corporation's plans to rob us of our natural resources and peace and quiet.

The permitting process set by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires public comment prior to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors vote to issue or deny the 100-year permit. The application process included an informational public presentation and a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). As the process proceeds, local activists are organizing to stop this giveaway of the large section of the riverbank to be dug up for gravel.

The permit process's DEIR phase, now submitted and posted on the County website, had a comment period that ended on March 10. Now the County Planning Department must respond to each comment on the environmental impacts and suggested mitigations. During this period, we can send letters and e-mail messages to the supervisors expressing our objections to issuing a permit for this destructive plan.

To see the DEIR, visit [fresnocountyca.gov](http://fresnocountyca.gov) and use "CEMEX" as a search term to access the page with documents on the "CEMEX Rockfield Expansion."

Finally, there will be public testimony at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors before the vote.

Also, the City of Fresno could sue the Board seeking non-issuance of the permit. The City does not want the gravel-mining expansion because of more housing development to come and traffic being slowed by heavy-heavy-duty trucks using the two-lane Friant road. ("Heavy-heavy-duty" is a term of law. These heavy trucks are not subject to CO2 reduction requirements.)

CEMEX hopes that the permit-application procedure will be one part of its expansion plans.

Key Factors	Rating Score
Landform	2
Vegetation	4
Water	4
Color	3
Influence of Adjacent Property	2
Scarcity	3
Cultural Modifications	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>



SOURCE: Sespe Consulting, Inc. 2022

It also realizes that public pressure could derail those plans, as happened with CEMEX's plan to turn Jesse Morrow Mountain to gravel a decade earlier.

Jesse Morrow Mountain is the first foothill along Highway 180, east to Kings Canyon National Park, a sacred site for Native Americans and a gateway to the Sierras. In the final public hearing on Jesse Morrow in the banquet room of the County Plaza before the Board of Supervisors, both preservationists and CEMEX workers testified. A swing vote resulted in a 3-2 denial of the permit. Years of bumper stickers pleading "Save Jesse Morrow Mountain" had succeeded.

We can also succeed in saving this section of the south bank of the San Joaquin River for future generations.

Our supervisors are responsive to what the people of Fresno County want. Let us show them that we want to return our San Joaquin River to its natural richness of life.

—Ron Martin

The author, Ron Martin, is chair of the Conservation Committee of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club and a member of the Executive Committee of Sierra Club California, the Club's group for legislative advocacy.

