

Long day's journey into night for quarry issue

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SANTA CRUZ — In what may set the standard for local long-winded public hearings in the 1990s, the Board of Supervisors sat patiently Tuesday afternoon and into the late evening listening to arguments over whether mining operations at Quail Hollow quarry should be expanded.

Environmentalists have fought for more than a year to stop any such mining and the expansion was halted by the county Planning Commission. Tuesday's meeting was an appeal of that decision.

More than 100 people crowded into the meeting Tuesday afternoon and stayed for much of the evening as the question of quarry expansion was debated and redebated by a plethora of local organizations and attorneys.

People supporting the mining wore labels that bore the words "Jerk Around" with a slash drawn through them. Miners claim that in a county memo about the Quail Hollow controversy someone proposed the way to stall the mining was to "Jerk (them) around."

Supervisors consider expansion at marathon hearing

Environmentalists, meanwhile, bore small yellow flowers pinned to their chest, resembling the Ben Lomond Wall Flower, a flower they claim will be endangered by any mining on the ridge.

By 9 p.m. supervisors were still listening to testimony from hydrologists, geologists and environmentalists on potential dangers involved with mining the area.

More than 125 people were still crowded into the board Chamber. One of them was Linda Wilson of Santa Cruz, a member of the Sierra Club who has been working to stop the mining project for more than a year.

"This is the only way we can protect this land," said Wilson, who had stayed in the meeting throughout the day. "This is the most important native plant habitat in Santa Cruz County. It's really unique in the whole world."

With hours of testimony remaining, a decision before the meeting ended appeared unlikely.

Each supervisor was flanked by six large volumes of legal wrangling, environmental studies and bureaucratic correspondence as the hearing dragged on. As attorneys argued their cases they referred to pages in the volumes while supervisors scrambled to keep up with the deluge of arguments and information.

The controversy revolves around the sandy south ridge of Quail Hollow Quarry in the San Lorenzo Valley that is owned by Granite Rock Co. The ridge is part of five parcels of land that were first mined in 1954. The county granted a permit for mining the area in 1955.

Granite Rock has leased the ridge property to Santa Cruz Aggregates for mining. The companies want to strip mine the sand there, which is used in the manufacture of glass and fiberglass.

That plan has met with resistance from local groups since it was proposed early last year. Residents claim the mining might affect local water supplies, pose a health hazard due to dust and destroy the beauty of

the area.

In essence, the county is contending that even though the area has been mined in the past, the permit process has been wrong. So the Planning Commission has denied the owner's right to mine the area.

Santa Cruz Aggregates, on the other hand, claims that it has a "vested right" to continue to mine the area, and that if there have been any bureaucratic mishaps, the long history of mining in the area shows that previous county officials intended for mining to be done there.

"Our position states that the previous actions state the intent of the parties at that time," said Lloyd Williams, representing Santa Cruz Aggregates at Tuesday's hearing. "Without question (those actions) did mean that we have the right to mine the entire quarry."

The miners argue that they have been in operation for more than 30 years without having their permit to mine the area questioned, and claim that the county has adopted an unwritten anti-mining stance which it is seeking to enforce illegally.