

Quarry

sues county over permit

Firm denied right to mine sand hill

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The owners and operators of a Felton sand quarry have sued Santa Cruz County after supervisors denied them a permit to mine the southern portion of the Quail Hollow quarry.

Granite Rock Co. and Santa Cruz Aggregates filed a civil suit Wednesday in Santa Cruz County Superior Court asking for judicial review of the Feb. 13 supervisors' decision that the companies do not have rights to mine sand from the south ridge of the quarry.

Mining company attorney Lloyd Williams maintains that Santa Cruz Aggregates' rights to mine the south ridge were included in mining plans approved in the 1950s and 1960s. The ridge has been mined continuously for the past 35 years.

The so-called south ridge is part of a 240-acre family-owned quarry in northeast Felton. Owned by Granite Rock Co., Quail Hollow quarry is on a 10 million-year-old sand hill nestled between Felton and Zayante. It has been operated by Santa Cruz Aggregates under a lease agreement since the early 1970s.

Santa Cruz Aggregates, which is mining the south ridge, is interested in quarrying the south ridge because it contains high-quality sand used to make glass and fiberglass products. The company says the southern end of the quarry contains one of the most significant deposits of premium sands in Northern California, and is worth an estimated \$50 million.

These resources, say quarry officials, are necessary for rebuilding structures damaged by the Oct. 17 Loma Prieta earthquake, because of their unique physical characteristics and proximity to quake-damaged areas.

Williams maintains that Santa Cruz County issued valid use permits to Santa Cruz Aggregates in 1955, 1962 and 1964 authorizing the mining of all 240 acres.

The Santa Cruz County Planning Commission disagreed with Williams' contention back in January

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Quarry owners say permits include right to mine ridge

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1989, when it voted against proposed quarry activity along the south ridge. Quarry company representatives, who then appealed that decision with supervisors, charge that the county bowed to political pressure in making its decision.

"County officials expressly acknowledged the quarry's lawful activities since the start of mining operations," said Williams in a prepared statement. "Zoning permitted the property's use as a quarry and it was designated as such in the general plan.

"Apparently in response to political pressure, the county changed its outlook and decided to challenge the legality of the quarry's mining activities in January of 1989."

Environmentalists and some residents have opposed mining of the south ridge, which they called an ecological island and home to an extraordinary concentration of unusual flora and fauna. Residents were also concerned that quarrying the south ridge would divert underground springs that feed their wells, and cause their water supply to dry up.