

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR or DEIR) was prepared in accordance with and in fulfillment of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA; Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000 et seq.). As described in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15121(a), an environmental impact report (EIR) is a public informational document that assesses the potentially significant environmental impacts of a project. CEQA requires that an EIR be prepared by the agency with primary responsibility over the approval of a project (the lead agency). The County of San Bernardino (County) is the lead agency for the proposed White Knob/White Ridge Limestone Quarries Expansion project. Public agencies are charged with the duty to consider and minimize environmental impacts of proposed development where feasible and have the obligation to balance economic, environmental, and social factors.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE EIR

CEQA requires the preparation of an EIR prior to approving any project that may have a significant effect on the environment. The County has determined that the proposed White Knob/White Ridge Limestone Quarries Expansion is a project under CEQA based on CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(a)(3) as follows:

(a) "Project" means the whole of an action, which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, and that is any of the following:

(3) An activity involving the issuance to a person of a lease, permit, license, certificate, or other entitlement for use by one or more public agencies.

The County of San Bernardino has determined that preparation of an EIR is the appropriate CEQA-required documentation due to the potential for significant environmental impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed project. This Draft EIR evaluates the existing environmental resources in the vicinity of the project site, analyzes potential impacts on those resources due to implementation of the proposed project, and if necessary, identifies mitigation measures that could avoid or reduce the magnitude of those impacts. This Draft EIR also evaluates reasonable alternatives to the proposed project.

1.2 KNOWN TRUSTEE AND RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

For the purpose of CEQA, the term "trustee agency" means a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project which are held in trust for the people of the State of California. Specifically, the following trustee agencies may have an interest in the proposed White Knob/White Ridge Limestone Quarries Expansion project:

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire)

In CEQA, the term "responsible agency" includes all public agencies other than the lead agency that may have discretionary actions associated with the implementation of the proposed White Knob/White Ridge Limestone Quarries Expansion project. The following agencies have been identified as responsible agencies for the proposed project:

- California Department of Conservation, Office of Mine Reclamation
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District
- Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board
- U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

1.3 TYPE OF DOCUMENT

The CEQA Guidelines identify several types of EIRs, each applicable to different project circumstances. This EIR serves as a “project EIR.” According to the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15161), a project EIR is “the most common type of EIR” that “examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. This type of EIR should focus primarily on the changes in the environment that would result from the development project.” This type of EIR “shall examine all phases of the project including planning, construction, and operation.”

1.4 ORGANIZATION AND SCOPE

Sections 15122 through 15132 of the CEQA Guidelines identify content requirements for Draft and Final EIRs. An EIR must include a description of the environmental setting, an environmental impact analysis, mitigation measures, alternatives, significant irreversible environmental changes, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts. The environmental issues addressed in this Draft EIR were established through review of environmental documentation developed for the project, environmental documentation for nearby projects, and public agency responses to the Notice of Preparation (NOP). This Draft EIR is organized in the following sections:

CHAPTER ES – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section provides a project narrative and identifies environmental impacts and mitigation measures through a summary matrix consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15123.

CHAPTER 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview that describes the intended use of the EIR, as well as the review and certification process.

CHAPTER 2.0 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This section provides a detailed description of the proposed project and project objectives, along with background information and physical characteristics consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15124.

CHAPTER 3.0 – ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This section contains technical analyses relative to each environmental topic. Included in this section is a comprehensive analysis related to impacts and mitigations that correspond to project implementation. Each subsection contains a description of the existing setting of the project site. The environmental topics are summarized as follows:

- Aesthetics

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Environmental Effects Determined Not to Be Significant

CHAPTER 4.0 – OTHER CEQA ANALYSIS

This section discusses the cumulative impacts associated with the proposed project that, when combined with past, present, and reasonably anticipated future events, may have a cumulative impact.

This section also contains discussions of growth-inducing effects that would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented, as well as unavoidable significant environmental effects, including those that can be mitigated but not reduced to a level of insignificance.

CHAPTER 5.0 – PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

This section discusses alternatives to the proposed project, including the CEQA mandatory “No Project” alternative, that are intended to avoid or reduce significant environmental impacts of the proposed project. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2) specifies that:

“If the environmentally superior alternative is the “no project” alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.”

CHAPTER 6.0 – REFERENCES

This section lists all reference material used in the EIR.

CHAPTER 7.0 – REPORT PREPARERS

This section lists all authors and agencies that assisted in the preparation of the report by name, title, and company or agency affiliation.

TECHNICAL APPENDICES

This volume includes all notices and other procedural documents pertinent to the EIR, as well as all technical material prepared to support the analysis.

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1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The review and certification process for the EIR will involve the following general procedural steps:

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the County prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EIR for the project on June 10, 2013. The County was identified as the lead agency for the proposed project. The notice was circulated to the public, local, state, and federal agencies, and other interested parties to solicit comments on the proposed project. Concerns raised in response to the NOP were considered during preparation of the Draft EIR. The NOP and responses by interested parties are presented in **EIR Appendix A**.

DRAFT EIR

This document constitutes the Draft EIR. The Draft EIR contains a description of the project, description of the environmental setting, identification of project impacts, and mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant, as well as an analysis of project alternatives. Upon completion of the Draft EIR, the County will file the Notice of Completion (NOC) with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research to begin the public review period (Public Resources Code Section 21161).

PUBLIC NOTICE/PUBLIC REVIEW

Concurrent with the Notice of Completion (NOC), the County will provide public notice of the availability of the Draft EIR for public review and invite comment from the general public, agencies, organizations, and other interested parties. The public review and comment period is forty-five (45) days. Public comment on the Draft EIR will be accepted both in written form and orally at public hearings. Notice of the time and location of the hearing will be published prior to the hearing. All comments or questions regarding the Draft EIR should be addressed to:

County of San Bernardino
Land Use Services Department
Mining Section
385 N. Arrowhead Avenue
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0182
Attention: Carrie Hyke, District Planner

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS/FINAL EIR

Following the public review period, a Final EIR (FEIR) will be prepared. The FEIR will respond to written comments received during the public review period and to oral comments made at any public hearing.

CERTIFICATION OF THE EIR/PROJECT CONSIDERATION

The County will review and consider the FEIR. If the County finds that the FEIR is "adequate and complete," the County may certify the FEIR. Upon review and consideration of the FEIR, the County may act on the proposed project. A decision to approve the project would be accompanied by written findings in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 regarding

findings and, if applicable, Section 15093 regarding statements of overriding considerations. The County would also adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, as described below, for mitigation measures that have been incorporated into or imposed on the project to reduce or avoid significant effects on the environment.

MITIGATION MONITORING

CEQA requires lead agencies to adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) to describe measures that have been adopted or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment (California Public Resources Code Section 21081.6(a)). The specific "reporting or monitoring" program required by CEQA is not required to be included in the EIR; however, it will be presented to County decision-makers for adoption along with the EIR. Throughout the EIR, however, mitigation measures have been clearly identified and presented in language that will facilitate establishment of a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program. Any mitigation measures adopted by the Board of Supervisors as conditions for approval of the project will be included in the MMRP to ensure and verify compliance. The MMRP will be prepared as a separate document and will be part of the project documentation to be considered for adoption by the County planning Commission.

1.6 COMMENTS RECEIVED ON THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION

The County received four comment letters on the Notice of Preparation for the White Knob/White Ridge Limestone Quarries Expansion project DEIR. A copy of each letter is provided in **EIR Appendix A**. The County received letters from the following state and local agencies.

- Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC)
- California Department of Conservation – Office of Mine Reclamation (OMR)

The following summarizes issues raised in the comment letters as well as the author of the letter.

MDAQMD

- The district states that they are in agreement with the NOP's assessment of the proposed project's air quality impacts.

CDFW

- The CDFW states that the CEQA document should contain sufficient, specific, and current biological information on the existing habitat and species at the project site, including all documents used to determine impacts.
- The CEQA document should not defer impact analysis and mitigation measures to future regulatory discretionary actions, such as a Lake or Streambed Agreement.
- Sensitive species have been identified on the project site, and species-specific surveys should be conducted and all identified sensitive species should be assessed in the DEIR.

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- Compliance with approved habitat plans, such as the Carbonate Habitat Management Strategy (CHMS), should be discussed in the DEIR.
- A California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Incidental Take Permit must be obtained if the project has the potential to result in take of species of plants or animals listed under the CESA.
- A Notification of Lake or Streambed Alteration is required by the CDFW, which recommends that the entirety of the project site be assessed for the potential presence of CDFW jurisdictional areas.
- The CEQA document should summarize the Ruby Springs monitoring reports and provide complete copies of the reports to CDFW staff to assist in the Jurisdictional Determination.
- The phased nature of the proposed project may lead to significant temporal impacts and direct impacts to species such as bighorn sheep, raptors, and plants associated with carbonate soils. A thorough discussion of impacts associated with project activities and the phased approach to development and reclamation should be included in the EIR.
- A cumulative effects analysis should include project-related impacts to riparian areas, wetlands, vernal pools, alluvial fan habitats, wildlife corridors or movement areas, aquatic habitats, sensitive species, and other sensitive habitats, open lands, and adjacent natural habitats.
- The alternative analysis should include a range of alternatives that avoid or minimize impacts to biological resources. All Rare Natural Communities should be fully avoided and protected from project-related impacts. The EIR should include an evaluation of specific alternative locations with lower resource sensitivity. Off-site compensation for unavoidable impacts through acquisition and protection of high-quality habitat should be addressed.
- Bighorn sheep, mule deer, and other native animals use the project site for movement between habitats, bedding, escape terrain, and other important activities. Actions to prevent and mitigate impacts to these important forage resources and habitats should be addressed.
- Disturbance to bighorn sheep should be addressed, as well as the potential loss of individuals to mortality related to blasting, vehicle collision, or other mining activities or as a consequence of decreased access to forage. Consequences of loss of individuals should address population-level impacts to the persistence of this small population.
- Barriers to movement of bighorn sheep both for within-range movement and for immigration and emigration, and the consequences, should be evaluated. The topography of the quarries (slopes, bench height) should be assessed relative to the permeability for movement of bighorn sheep, deer, fox, bobcat, etc. Design of highwalls should address the ability of bighorn sheep and other species to traverse slopes, such as by planning for non-vertical slopes and benches with ramps between levels.
- In addition to impacts to habitat and wildlife, limits to access by recreational hunters to the project areas should be addressed.

- The DEIR should quantify impacts to habitats and species per the informational requirements of CEQA. An accompanying map showing the areas of impact should also be included.
- The DEIR should include current (completed within the 12-month period prior to circulation of the CEQA document) biological surveys for fauna and flora. If sensitive species may occur within the project area, species-specific surveys, conducted at the appropriate time of year and time of day, should be included with the CEQA document.
- The CEQA document should provide an analysis of the project's effects on the CHMS. The CEQA document should include a discussion of how the project will affect plan assembly, how the project will affect the goals and objectives of the CHMS, the applicable policies and procedures that pertain to the project, a discussion of survey requirements, and a list of proposed mitigation measures required. A copy of any documents required by the CHMS should be included with the CEQA document.
- A CESA Incidental Take Permit must be obtained if the project has the potential to result in "take" (California Fish and Game Code Section 86 defines "take" as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill") of State-listed CESA species, either through construction or over the life of the project.
- The DEIR should provide a thorough analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts and identify specific measures to offset such impacts.
- To avoid confusion between the mine site "reclamation" required by the Forest Service Mineral Regulations and the California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) and "mitigation" required under CEQA and other programs, the CDFW requests that the DEIR include a thorough analysis and comparison of the reclamation for the mining and the mitigation for the environmental impacts. The CDFW also recommends updating the revegetation plan within the approved SMARA reclamation plan.

NAHC

- Contact the appropriate Information Center for a record search to determine if a part or all of the area of project effect has been previously surveyed for cultural places. The NAHC recommends that known traditional cultural resources recorded on or adjacent to the project site be listed in the DEIR.
- Lead agencies should include in the mitigation plan provisions for the identification and evaluation of accidentally discovered archeological resources. In areas of identified archaeological sensitivity, a certified archaeologist and a culturally affiliated Native American, with knowledge of cultural resources, should monitor all ground-disturbing activities.
- Lead agencies should include in the mitigation plan provisions for the disposition of recovered artifacts, in consultation with culturally affiliated Native Americans.
- Lead agencies should include in the mitigation plan provisions for discovery of Native American human remains. Health and Safety Code Section 5097.98 mandates the process to be followed.

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OMR

- The OMR has no specific comments on the Initial Study at this time.
- It is recommended that the reclamation plan not be finalized or approved until mitigation is determined.
- The amended reclamation plan includes a number of maps and cross sections that must bear the signature of the licensed professional in responsible charge who prepared them.
- The reclamation plan does not address stabilization and reclamation of the Northwest Slope of the Annex Quarry or the area of inadvertent boulder roll directly north of the White Knob Quarry. The reclamation plan should include measures to stabilize and reclaim these areas.
- Comments concerning the January 14, 2013, CHJ Consultants study entitled "Slope Stability Investigation, Proposed Amended Plan Operations, White Knob Quarry Mining and Reclamation Plan, Lucerne valley, California" were made by the OMR stating that the study needed to be revised to address issues raised by the OMR.
- The "White Knob Haul Road, Drainage Study and Plan of Development" report must be stamped by the professional in responsible charge of the study and resubmitted to the OMR. The OMR cannot review preliminary work.
- The applicant should consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine if a Stream and Lake Bed Alteration Agreement will be required.
- The amended reclamation plan provides recommended success criteria for naturally occurring habitats in Table 12 on page 61. The table may need to be revised for accuracy, as the figures for density and species richness in the table may have been inadvertently reversed.
- The OMR recommends reevaluating the baseline data in order to have a quantifiable density figure for all native perennials.
- The reclamation plan must have a signed statement accepting responsibility for reclamation per the approved reclamation plan.
- The reclamation plan must include a financial assurance estimate.
- SMARA Section 2774 provides the requirements with respect to lead agency approvals of reclamation plans, plan amendments, and financial assurances.