



Summer Edition

# REFLECTIONS

Upon a Delicate Treasure!

July 2007

Safeguarding the Kings River for future generations.

## Gravel Mining

By Kay Barnes, Guest Writer

The opinions expressed in the following article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of el Río Reyes Conservation Trust.

If eastern Fresno County becomes the center for aggregate production in the central valley, what will be the known and expected impacts on the residents and land of eastern Fresno County and indeed for the residents of the valley?

Certainly, the mine companies, the aggregate truckers, the mining interest lobbyists, and consultants, paving companies and concrete contractors would have us believe that mining will be benign and may actually improve the land and the Kings River or have negligible and "mitigatable" effects.

***If the Jesse Morrow mine is approved by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, the south facing slope will become a giant staircase and the mountain will be lighted all night!***

Can we make judgments on the companies' own plans and the counter claims of experts in the fields of health, water issues, traffic volume, general quality of life, and aesthetic concerns?

Let's start with aesthetics. Jesse Morrow, a mountain about 20 miles east of the city of Fresno on county designated scenic Highway 180, is scheduled, if CEMEX, a multinational company headquartered in Mexico, has its way, to



Jesse Morrow Mountain

become a hard rock mine. The mine will be located on the south side of the mountain. This side of the mountain is visible to the million or more tourists who drive to Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. Currently, tourists are treated to Mt. Campbell on

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## Bob Frisch Memorial Ride

By Connie Krahn



El Río Reyes Conservation Trust will host its ninth annual poker ride on Saturday, September 8, 2007. This fundraising event was developed by Bob Frisch and it is fitting the ride be named for Bob. The ride will originate at the Reedley College Horse Unit. Registration will start at 9:00 A.M. and at 10:00 A.M. the riders will begin a scenic four-mile guided tour on Reedley College's Kings River Trail. A tri-tip barbecue lunch with all the trimmings will be served when the riders return.

Take time out of your busy schedule and join in the ride and a great lunch.

- Pre-registration by September 7 — \$30.00
- Registration on the day of the ride — \$35.00

Please make checks payable to: el Río Reyes Trust, P.O. Box 1339, Reedley, CA 93654

## Legacy: The Priceless Wonder of the Kings River

By Rachel Barker, Guest Writer

The opinions expressed in the following article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of el Río Reyes Conservation Trust.

In a time when environmental issues swirl around rules, laws, and reports, it is easy to forget the fundamental reason that we fight for the Kings River. It brings us a sense of peace, of tranquility, and a continuing source of wonder and discovery that the generations yet to come will need and appreciate. Its value is beyond calculation, and beyond the sum of its parts. This river's

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the south side of the road and Jesse Morrow on the north side, as they drive through a narrow gap between the two foothills that provides a grand entrance to the higher country ahead. Both of these mountains are now covered with annual grasses, a sprinkling of flowers in the spring, rocky outcroppings, and grazing cattle.

If the Jesse Morrow mine is approved by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, the south facing slope will become a giant staircase produced by a mining process called *benching*. Benching

**What impact will this increased heavy industrial activity have on the health of the locals, and how will it effect the entire valley?**

ching requires blasting of rock using fuel oil and fertilizer to loosen the rock for further processing. There will be haul roads on the benches and conveyor systems carrying blasted rock to the processing areas below. Because the company wishes to have permission to mine 24/7, the mountain will be lighted all night! Will this view be an improvement over the current landscape? This question answers itself.

The Kings River is bordered by riparian vegetation that stretches back several hundred feet from the river. Think Pilibos Ranch on Highway 180 near Minkler for an idea as to the unspoiled nature of a

riverine landscape, or the river running north from Reedley College. Vulcan, the mining company currently operating in Centerville, has applied for a conditional use permit to double the size of its operation. The company plan is to use a drag line to dig and extract gravel from pits dug 100 feet from the river. The holes that will be produced will be 100+ feet deep and extend down into the aquifer. Where this is done, the river will become in effect, a ditch with a bank 100 feet wide, about the width of many housing lots, with deep pools on the side being mined.



Vulcan Materials Company  
Sanger-Centerville Expansion - Mine and Reclamation Plan  
Fresno County, California

Banks 100 feet wide will be inadequate for a wildlife corridor, for protecting old Valley Oaks and will not screen the mining operation from boaters. In addition, because the ponds are so deep they will expose the aquifer to air and valuable water will be lost to evaporation. The company has no plans to fill the ponds and they will remain a danger forever. The miners and consultants claim that they are creating "wildlife habitat". Ask the deer, the skunks, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes if pools this deep create habitat or hazard. This kind of habitat creation exists as a good thing only in

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**Legacy** (Continued from page 1)

worth is greater than dollars and cents; and more than the value of its sand or gravel on the market.

I am twenty-six years old, and Reedley has been my home for my entire life. Buildings, businesses, and people come and go, but the Kings River remains a faithful and constant feature of the landscape. In the face of development, worsening air quality, and increasing population, the Kings flows imperturbably along its course, nourishing the landscape and offering a restful and attrac-



tive habitat along its banks. Huge, solemn valley oaks grow along its banks, and a varied and healthy wildlife population thrives in and by the water's edge. I have many memories of spending time with my family on the banks of the Kings River, building sand castles, playing in the water, and watching the mosses as they undulated gently in the current. The opportunity to spend time with nature, learning her rules and secrets, was a priceless experi-

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ence, and I know that these experiences were a formative and valuable part of my childhood. I always knew that some things were constant and beautiful. Even now, I go to the river to watch the waters flow, because it is a place of peace. Modern research shows that direct experience with nature is a necessary part of a child's life, and I wholeheartedly agree. The Kings River was and is good for this natural education. Many families still visit the banks of the Kings River, just as my parents did many years ago. It is enjoyable to see children observing and interacting with their environment, just as I did. There, they can see a vibrant ecosystem, filled with plants and animals of many sorts, and it is located very close to their homes. They can see that the system works together and is healthy. This rich resource is thus beyond price, since it provides such a valuable educational experience for all generations.

Gravel mining would so damage and alter this ecosystem that the full impacts cannot be fully understood. The clear, clean waters would be polluted if mining operations were allowed to delve into the river's floodplain and pump millions of gallons of water daily from the water table. The smoothly-flowing river would

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## Gravel Mining *(Continued from page 2)*

the minds of the miners and their cast of supporters.

What impact will this increased heavy industrial activity have on the health of the locals, and how will it effect the entire valley? The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District has been granted an extension of the previous 2013 federal clean air deadline because they do not think that the district can meet the deadline. Does it make sense to approve a mine that will blast debris into the air several times a week, run 900 trucks per day down Highway 180 and add that to the diesel particles that will be produced by the 900 trucks coming from an expanded Vulcan? To add these new sources of air pollution to our already seriously filthy air, and increase the known dangers to the developing lungs of children, to add to the burden of the highest rates of asthma in the U.S. demonstrates a seriously uncaring policy from both the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District to our county and city governments that should be protesting and acting on our behalf. These collateral health costs are never figured into the “savings” produced by having easily accessible material.

What can residents of Squaw Valley, Wonder Valley, tourists, Blossom Trail visitors, and other expect?

- More accidents on Highway 180, presently a two lane road.
- More traffic congestion.
- Windshield damage.
- More asthma.
- Kids whose lifetime lung health is compromised by diesel pollution.

There are other facilities planned for the immediate area. One, on Annadale Avenue, is asking for an extension of their current permit and another, on Goodfellow, which was given a permit in 1998, but did not follow through on the conditions, is asking for a new environmental study.

Aggregate is a finite resource – once locations are depleted, where will the companies go? They need product and will go to new and maybe less harmful locations to get the product they need. They will move on. House will be built. Highways and county roads will be built. No one will think that the new cost is excessive. But the citizens of Fresno County will mourn the loss of the river and the decapitation of the mountain, and that is a cost that cannot be measured in dollars.

## Guest Articles

As you can see, two of the articles in this edition of Reflections are by guest writers. These articles provide different perspectives on issues that affect the Kings River and its environs.

The board of directors of El Río Reyes Conservation Trust would like to extend an invitation to its readers to submit an article for publication on issues that are important to you. Articles might address threats to the river, its value as a resource for agriculture, recreation, quality of life, aesthetics, or its importance to present and future generations for myriad reasons.

The board reserves the right to exercise editorial control over all articles submitted for publication. Articles chosen for publication are at the sole discretion of the board of directors.

Please contact El Río Reyes Conservation Trust at PO Box 1339, Reedley, CA 93654 or Connie Krahn, President, at (559) 638-9617 to submit an article.

We look forward to hearing from you. Make your voice heard!

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eventually wander into the 150-foot pits that mines would leave behind, creating unnatural, deep ponds in the streambed and hazards for people who seek recreation. Mining would involve removing deposits of sand and gravel that are an integral part of the river's infrastructure, leaving it stripped and scarred. Water would not filter as it should, since those elements are part of the natural filtration system in our river.

***I hope to bring my own children to play in the Kings River. I want to show them its beauty, its changeability, and its constancy.***

The cumulative effect of these operations would not only be ecological, although that is a major consideration. Rather, a vibrant ecosystem would be gutted and spoiled, and diminished in the eyes of those who remembered its previous beauty. Recreation would never be the same again. People who once played in the clear waters and built sand castles would look upon a ruined habitat and wish that their children could have played in the river as it once was. When an environment such as our Kings River is the target of damaging operations, such as mining, there is a sense that an important member of the community, a living being, has died. Children cannot make a connection with it because it has nothing to offer them. Its life and function have become sullied for the sake of profit, and it is such a sad thing that they cannot learn the lessons that it once used to teach. They can only look upon it and wish that they could play there as previous generations played.

We must save our river. It is the remnant of a past age, when nature was a part of everyday life and the pace of life was much



slower. It is the most pristine river of its type left in California. The others have been exploited for mining and other commercial purposes. The Kings River is our link to those bygone times; a living relic of times past. Perhaps the children understand this as they splash in the water. In such a place, it is easy to imagine living there two hundred years ago, fishing for your food and making baskets from the reeds. There is a sense of past, present, and future when once stops to experience the river. This vital connection must be saved for now and for future generations.

I hope to bring my own children to play in the Kings River. I want to show them its beauty, its changeability, and its constancy. I want them to understand that nature is more than a sum of its parts, but a precious resource that can teach us so many things. I want them to grow to love the river, to feel a sense of ownership and protection toward it. I want them to have memories like so many others who have played, lived, and learned on the banks of the Kings River.