

Society of the Sacred Heart Sisters
1624 Union Avenue
Redwood City, CA 94061-2718

September 24, 2017

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Board of Supervisors
70 West Hedding Street, East Wing, 10th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110

Dear County Board of Supervisors,

I have just learned that the most Sacred Site of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is under threat of a surface mining proposal. The site I refer to is "Juristac", now known as Sargent Ranch. By its original inhabitants, of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, its name translates to "place of the Big Head". Now these Sacred Mountains could be reduced to an extractive sand and gravel mining operation, a pit in the ground. For this reason, I would like to speak to this issue.

I understand there is probably a huge gap in awareness on the part of most of us, since it has been around 200 years since the original inhabitants of the mountain and its surrounding areas were removed from it by the mission personnel, and we are not accustomed to adjusting our thinking that far back. The spiritual significance of this site to these indigenous people is, however, equivalent to what Jerusalem means to the Jewish people, or Guadalupe near Mexico City, to Catholics and others of the country of Mexico.

I have read some of the letters addressed to the Board of Supervisors of Santa Clara County on the issue, by various California university professors of history, cultural anthropology, archaeology, ethnic studies, education, as well as scholars of religion. I must say I agree with all of them, and find some of their remarks particularly poignant. For example, Professor Jennifer Scheper Hughes, Phd, of UC Riverside, saying:

"The State of California has a long, painful, and difficult history of illegal infringement on the rights of native peoples...."

I have recently retired from over a decade of service with indigenous peoples in the western part of the U.S., particularly in north-central Idaho and southern California. In the process I have learned much about "the painful and difficult history of illegal infringement" of which Professor Hughes speaks. I presume the Board's knowledge of the Mission Era, the Mexican Era, and the Gold Rush Era, which followed one after the other in rapid succession, each one with greater disastrous consequences for the native peoples of California. Those few Indians remaining to experience the Gold Rush Era had been left totally landless and without sustenance (access to food), vulnerable to being shot on sight. Read the book, MURDER STATE by Brendan C. Lindsay, as well as "EXTERMINATE THEM!", edited by Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer. Also Helen Hunt Jackson's historical novel, RAMONA. As to "recognition" by the federal government, only those tribes with land could and can be recognized !! With no land left to them at the end of all this.

As I understand it, there were once four Indian villages at Juristac, where generations had lived and died and been buried, prior to the Mission Era, which began in the late 18th century. As already written

by professors at UCSD, I too urge you to “follow both ethical and legal mandates and to work directly and collaboratively with the Amah Mutsun”.

Not only should the mountain site be preserved for them, for their religious ceremonies, but they are the best of caretakers of the earth. I have heard Chairman Val Lopez talk about what Martin Quigley (Exec. Director, UCSC Arboretum, Adjunct Professor, Environmental Studies) and Brett Hall (Director, UCSC Arboretum) mention in their letter, about the “seriousness to care for their homelands” having been demonstrated “in their cooperative agreements throughout the county with agencies such as California State Parks and the Bureau of Land Management.” I understand the proposed mining project is likely to have a detrimental impact on the local environment, including water quality, wildlife, and plant communities that make up the cultural landscape. This definitely should be taken into consideration in terms of the proposed project. Berkey Williams LLP's letter states that the proposed 3-decades-long mining project will “cause significant adverse environmental impacts to the water, wildlife, plants and other natural and cultural resources in the area forever.”

I urge you, the Board of Supervisors of Santa Clara County, then, to work with the Amah Mutsun in a joint effort to reclaim their sacred site, Juristac, for their benefit and everybody else's.

Sincerely,

(Sister) Deanna Rose von Barga, RSCJ
Society of the Sacred Heart Sisters, Redwood City, CA