



August 15, 2022

Gilroy City Council

**Re: Item 11.4 – Please oppose Sargent Ranch Quarry, Support the Amah Mutsun, and support protection of Sargent Ranch/Juristac as open space**

Dear Mayor Blankley and Council Members,

On behalf of Green Foothills<sup>1</sup>, I am contacting the City Council to ask you to take action on an issue of great importance for Indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage and for open space and wildlife in Santa Clara County. Together with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band<sup>2</sup> and our many partners in the Protect Juristac campaign, we ask you to approve a Council resolution calling for the permanent protection of the sacred landscape known as Juristac, and for the County of Santa Clara to reject the application for an open-pit sand and gravel mine on Juristac, known as the Sargent Ranch Quarry.

A draft resolution is attached for your consideration, the same one that was sent on August 12. Similar resolutions have already been approved by the City Councils of [Sunnyvale](#), [Santa Clara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), and [Morgan Hill](#). We respectfully request that the City Council take action to pass this resolution to support the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in the protection of their sacred landscape, and to protect the critical wildlife linkage and habitat at Juristac.

**Background on Juristac**

Juristac lies at the heart of the ancestral lands of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. The portion of Juristac known today as “Sargent Ranch” encompasses 6500 acres located at the very southern border of Santa Clara County, southwest of Gilroy (see image below). For thousands of years, the Amah Mutsun people held sacred ceremonies at this location -- the home of a powerful spiritual being known as Kuksui. Juristac translates to “Place of the Big Head,” and the Big Head dances associated with Kuksui and other healing and renewal ceremonies took place here over the centuries. Juristac was a gathering place for many tribes in the area, and its spiritual and cultural significance is unique in our region. (For more details on the history and the cultural and spiritual significance of Juristac, please visit [ProtectJuristac.org](#).)

---

<sup>1</sup> Green Foothills is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1962 to protect the open space, farmland and natural resources of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties for the benefit of all through advocacy, education and grassroots action. We envision a resilient region where wildlife thrive, everyone has natural beauty to enjoy, and communities live in balance with nature.

<sup>2</sup> The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is comprised of the descendants of the Indigenous peoples forcefully taken to missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz.



In addition, Juristac is a critical wildlife corridor that links the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Gabilan Range to the south and the Diablo Range to the east. This area has been identified as an important migration route in all habitat connectivity assessments for the region since the year 2000.<sup>3</sup> The Santa

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Penrod K, Hunter R, Merrifield M (2001) **Missing Linkages: Restoring Connectivity to the California Landscape**. South Coast Wildlands Project, Los Angeles; Spencer, W.D., Beier, P., Penrod, K., Parisi, M., Pettler, A., Winters, K., Stritholt, J., Paulman, C. and Rustigian-Romsos, H., 2010, **California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project: A strategy for conserving a connected California**, report prepared for California Department of Transportation and California Department of Fish and Game; Bay Area Open Space Council 2011, **The Conservation Lands Network: San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project Report**, Berkeley, CA; Penrod, K., Garding, P.E., Paulman, C., Beier, P., Weiss, S., Schaefer, N., Branciforte, R. and Gaffney, K., 2013, **Critical Linkages: Bay Area & Beyond**, produced by Science & Collaboration for Connected Wildlands,

Clara Valley Habitat Agency recognizes several landscape linkages running through the Sargent Ranch property (linkages 12, 18, 19 and 20 on [this map](#)). The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority considers the “Sargent Hills” area to be one of its top 10 conservation focus areas (number 8 on [this map](#)).

### **The Threat: an Open-Pit Sand and Gravel Mine**

The current owner of the property, the San Diego-based Debt Acquisition Company of America, has submitted an application to the County of Santa Clara for a sand and gravel open-pit mining operation on 400 acres of pristine hillside grassland at Juristac. According to documents filed with the County, the Sargent Ranch Quarry would operate for 30 years, would dig 4 pits hundreds of feet deep, and would pump about 76,000 gallons of groundwater per day for quarry operations. The quarry would permanently alter the Juristac landscape, turning hillsides into deep pits and scarring the landscape with truck haul roads, conveyor belts, and a 14-acre processing plant. Further information about the quarry proposal and the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the proposal can be found [on the County website](#).

The ecological impact of the proposed Sargent Ranch sand and gravel mine on Juristac would be severe for species such as mountain lions, which depend on the ability to migrate through this site for healthy population dynamics. Heavy industry such as mining causes disruption to animal movement due not only to the disturbed footprint of the project but also due to the daily noise and heavy vehicle activity, which can drive away sensitive wildlife species and prevent them from utilizing their usual migration routes. In this case, the proposed footprint of the mining operation lies directly across the main migration route for animals out of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Highway 101 is a significant barrier for wildlife movement, and there are only a few undercrossings beneath the highway where animals can travel. Since the proposed sand mine would potentially operate for 30 years or more, the continuing impact on the viability of these animal populations in the Santa Cruz Mountains could be severe and irremediable.

The Sargent Ranch Quarry could also severely impact the local watershed. According to project plans filed with the County of Santa Clara, the quarry pits would excavate the hillsides on both sides of Sargent Creek. This creek is a tributary to the Pajaro River, which is already heavily impacted from runoff and illegal dumping. The Sargent Creek watershed encompasses over 1200 acres and is estimated to provide hundreds of acre-feet of groundwater recharge and runoff. If the pits excavate below the water table, the integrity of the Sargent Creek watershed would be affected and its ability to recharge groundwater significantly impaired. Sargent Creek supports a rare stream-dwelling population of California red-legged frogs, a federally listed threatened species, which could be significantly impacted by the disruption, increased sediment, and other impacts to the creek and the watershed.

---

Fair Oaks, CA [[www.scwildlands.org](http://www.scwildlands.org)], in collaboration with the Bay Area Open Space Council's Conservation Lands Network [[www.BayAreaLands.org](http://www.BayAreaLands.org)].

The DEIR released by the County found 14 separate significant and unavoidable impacts from the mine, including to tribal cultural resources, wildlife movement, air quality, and aesthetics. These significant and unavoidable impacts will occur even with attempts at mitigation.

In particular, the DEIR found that there would be “permanent and irreversible alterations” to the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape, and that no reclamation activities could ever restore it to a condition that reflects its cultural significance. The DEIR also found that the mine, due to its location directly across a major wildlife corridor in and out of the Santa Cruz Mountains, would interfere substantially with wildlife movement, which could reduce genetic variability and make animal populations more vulnerable to local extinction.

The proposal will at peak production bring hundreds of truck trips back round-trip each day. (DEIR at 2-13 (one-way haul load of 24 tons per truck, up to 2,880 tons removed daily, and trucks need to return)). These trucks will drive through Gilroy on Highway 101 heading north, stalling traffic, shifting traffic to surface roads, damaging road infrastructure, and creating accidents. Gilroy residents will face increased traffic problems both from northward movement and when they attempt to drive south on Highway 101 and find the highway backed up, with southbound backups possibly extending for miles into Gilroy when accidents happen. This project both damages the region and damages the quality of life for Gilroy residents.

### **Please Approve a Council Resolution Calling for Protection of Juristac**

Opposition to the Sargent Ranch Quarry and support for the tribe’s efforts to protect Juristac has been steadily growing. The City Councils of [Sunnyvale](#), [Santa Clara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), and [Morgan Hill](#) have already approved resolutions on this issue (text of resolutions at above links). Numerous local and state elected officials, as well as over 50 nonprofit organizations, have signed on to support the Protect Juristac campaign.

We request that the City Council approve a resolution calling for the County to deny the application for the Sargent Ranch Quarry and for Juristac to be permanently protected in its entirety.



---

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Schmidt  
Policy and Advocacy Director, Green Foothills

(Draft Resolution included as a separate attachment)

