

Eden Area Interfaith Council

September 6, 2022

To the Santa Clara County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors:

The Eden Area Interfaith Council represents diverse religious organizations in the East Bay that promote respect for all faiths and human rights for all. We are a collective of fifteen religious groups in the Eden Area of Northern California's East Bay, including Hayward, San Leandro, and the unincorporated areas of southern Alameda County: Castro Valley, Cherryland, Ashland, Fairview, and San Lorenzo. We are also a Cooperating Circle of United Religions Initiative.

Our mission is to promote interfaith understanding and respect for all faiths, and to work together towards human rights, peace, social justice, and freedom from religious persecution. Our members include Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Unitarian Universalist faith communities, interfaith groups, and spiritually independent individuals.



All religions find the holy in specific places, whether their practice is to build a building or alter the landscape or intentionally preserve a place in its naturally sacred state. Thus, we recognize and respect that the Amah Mutsun revere Juristac as strongly as any other religious group reveres their mosque or temple or church or gurdwara or other sanctuary. No community would permit the destruction or desecration of their places of worship. We should not permit this to happen to Juristac. In addition, people of many faiths consider the natural environment a place where they can experience a strong connection to their spirituality and sacred beings, so many non-Indigenous people intuitively understand why preserving a specific naturally sacred place would be important.

In addition, in the case of the Amah Mutsun, their most sacred place of worship *is* a natural place. As people of faith, we recognize their right to determine what is sacred to them, and it is our obligation to learn about their religion, to respect their religious practices, and to protect the places their traditions designate as sacred. It is our obligation to stand in solidarity with Amah Mutsun people and support their religious rights and freedom to practice their religion.

We are gravely concerned by the proposal to put an open pit sand and gravel mine on the most sacred grounds of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, in the place called Juristac in southern Santa Clara County. Juristac has been sacred to the Amah Mutsun for thousands of years. People came from far and wide to worship together in this holy place.

When Europeans arrived in the area, they forced the Mutsun people off their ancestral lands and into slavery. Colonizers converted their sacred grounds into "private property" to be sold at will. This "property" is now the site of a proposed 400-acre sand and gravel mine that would

block a vital wildlife corridor, take 86,000 gallons of water a day from a sensitive aquifer, and permanently eliminate the right of the Amah Mutsun to practice their religion in their most sacred ancestral religious grounds.

We urge the Santa Clara County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to end the chain of religious persecution and human rights violations the tribe has experienced by denying the permit for the Sargent Quarry project and preventing the desecration of Juristac. This would be consistent with the intention of Santa Clara County to be a Human Rights County that is a model for the world. *Human rights include religious rights.*

There are other sources of sand and gravel. There is only one Juristac.

As an interfaith community the Eden Area Interfaith Council values all religions equally, respects every community's right to practice their religion freely, and stands for the protection of all places that are sacred to each religious community. Therefore, *we strongly support preserving Juristac* so the Amah Mutsun can return to Juristac to restore their ancestral culture and maintain their spiritual practices.

With respect,

Eden Area Interfaith Council
Bishop Robert Ephrem Lopez, President
Stephanie Spencer, Secretary
<https://edeninterfaith.weebly.com/>



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