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Hundreds Rally in San Jose for Protection of Sacred Tribal Land from Mining Project

Over 400 people gather to call on Santa Clara County to deny approval of proposed mine on sacred lands

SAN JOSE, CA— Hundreds gathered in front of the Santa Clara County Government Building in San Jose on Saturday to stand with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in calling on the County to deny permits for a proposed mining project that threatens the tribe's most sacred site.

Over two dozen speakers representing a broad range of communities, organizations, and California tribes spoke to the crowd, including Amah Mutsun Chair Valentin Lopez, 27th District Assemblymember Ash Kalra, Theodora Simon of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Gerardo Loera of the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley. ([Full speakers list below.](#)) The Rally was co-sponsored by 70 local organizations, all of which had representatives in attendance.

"This company wants to tear down our most sacred site and sell the sand and gravel. The County's regulations allow the destruction of the most sacred site of a Native American tribe. Can you believe that? Their regulations are fine with it. But we can't allow that to happen," **Chairman Valentin Lopez** said.

"If this was a Catholic, Jewish or Muslim or any other religion's sacred site, they would never even consider doing that," Lopez continued "They only want 8%¹ of the Vatican, they only want 8% of Mecca, what's the big deal here?' That is a big deal. That *is* a big deal to our tribe. And luckily, it's a big deal to everyone here, and we thank you for that."

"Today is about our cultural responsibility to take care of the land," **Veronica Martinez**, Amah Mutsun tribal member who acted as MC of the main stage. "This rally is a call to let us do just that. And it's a call for cultural survival."

Uwismak Singers, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band's traditional singing group, opened and closed the rally with ceremonial songs. Many of the 75 tribal members who were present at the rally gathered on stage at the end of the event to conduct a small ceremony to bless a bundle containing over 21,000 petition signatures.

¹ This is a reference to the property owner stating that the mining operation would only directly impact 8% of the overall Juristac/Sargent Ranch property.

The Amah Mutsun Youth Group presented the bundle of 21,000 signatures to the crowd, explaining that the tribe had intended to deliver the petitions to the County during the rally, but that no County staff member including the staff in the building that day were willing to receive them. “We will honor and deliver these petition signatures on our terms, not theirs,” Amah Mutsun **youth leader Hannah Moreno** told the crowd. “We are still here, we are fighting for our land, we are fighting for Mother Earth. We belong here, we need to stand together.”

“I’m honored to stand with each and every one of you to fight back against, once again another effort to take land away and to diminish and denigrate our indigenous communities,” 27th District California **Assemblymember Ash Kalra** said in his address to the rally. “This right here is absolutely beautiful. To see this turnout at your County building. To see this turnout, showing up to protect Juristac.”

“Let’s keep in mind there are folks in this building, there are folks on the board [of Supervisors], who are supportive,” Kalra said. “We want to let them know that you have a whole community with you. You have a whole community with you that’s going to lift you up and allow you to lead with justice and with righteousness. I want to thank you for being that community, I want to thank you for being that mountain of support that’s going to protect this land.”

“We can’t afford to continue bulldozing and fragmenting lands with high ecological and cultural value,” scientist **Tiffany Yap** of the Center for Biological Diversity said in her remarks. “A sand and gravel mine does not belong here. It will destroy these pristine habitats and degrade much of the needed wildlife connectivity.”

“This open pit mine would not only dig giant pits in the hillsides of Juristac it would also block animals like mountain lions from being able to migrate. That is why every single environmental organization in the area is opposing this quarry,” **Alice Kaufman of Green Foothills** said, “And let me say, it’s completely ridiculous and offensive that a project like this in the year 2022 was even proposed. That in spite of everything they’ve been told for the last seven years about the spirituality of the site and the importance of it for wildlife, this company is still trying to get their project approved.”

Alice Kaufman also announced for the first time the [Statement of Opposition to Sargent Ranch Quarry](#) that is co-signed by more than 100 elected officials, prominent individuals and organizations. “This is about a Southern California corporation trying to squeeze as much profit as possible out of this landscape. End of story. But our community is joining together to tell them no way.”

Santa Clara County’s public comment period on the Sargent Quarry Project that threatens Juristac is still open, but ends in just two weeks, on September 26th. This is a crucial window of time in which the public may submit written remarks on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the mining project. After the final Environmental Impact Report is certified, the County’s planning department will rule on whether to approve or deny the Conditional Use Permit for the mine. This decision is expected in early 2023 and the Tribe and allies will continue to take action to call for the protection of Juristac and demonstrate the breadth of public opposition.

“Our traditional stories tell us that if all the people get together, and they follow a plan, and do it the correct way, we can overcome anything,” Amah Mutsun **Vice Chair Ed Ketchum** told the crowd. “We can overcome this evil that’s upon us now, and we can protect Juristac. No sand pit!”

Press courtesy resources

Recorded livestream video of Rally speakers, pt. 1:

<https://fb.watch/fu4BFsuV6j/>

Folder of press courtesy photos: (will be continually updated during the 48 hours following the Rally)

<https://protectjuristac.org/pressfolder>

Folder of press courtesy video and b-roll: (will be updated during the 24 hours following the Rally)

<https://protectjuristac.org/pressvideo>

Campaign to Protect Juristac website:

<https://protectjuristac.org>

Rally for Juristac Speakers List

- Valentin Lopez, Chair, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
- Assemblymember Ash Kalra, 27th District of California
- Ed Ketchum, Vice Chair, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
- Gerardo Loera, Director of Development, Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley
- Corrina Gould, Chair, Confederated Villages of Lisjan
- Brian Franzen, Vice-Chair, Santa Clara County Human Rights Commission
- Theodora Simon, Indigenous Justice Advocate, ACLU of Northern California
- Tiffany Yap, Senior Scientist, Center for Biological Diversity
- Elisa Marina Alvarado, Red Earth Women's Society
- Antonio Gonzales, Director, American Indian Movement West
- Rev. Nancy Palmer, First Unitarian Church of San Jose
- Alice Kaufman, Policy & Advocacy Director, Green Foothills
- Gary Ding, Student Leader, Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action
- Raymond LeBeau, Pit River tribal member and Protect Medicine Lake advocate
- Calpulli Tonalehqueh Ceremonial Group
- Sherri Norris, Director, California Indian Environmental Alliance
- Richard Hobbs & Rhonda Berry, Human Agenda
- Roman C. Rain Tree (Dunlap Band of Mono/Choinumni Yokuts), Seeds for Sovereignty
- Assemblée of Tierras Milperas representatives from Pajaro Valley
- Susan Hayase, Co-Founder, San Jose Nikkei Resisters
- Youth Committee of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
- Uwismak Singers of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

Rally for Juristac Co-sponsors

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| ★ ACLU of Northern California | ★ Center for Biological Diversity |
| ★ Amah Mutsun Land Trust | ★ Community Agency for Resources, Advocacy and Services (CARAS) |
| ★ American Indian Movement West | ★ ConXión to Community |
| ★ Anakbayan San Jose | ★ Earthworks Action |
| ★ California Indian Environmental Alliance | ★ Environmental Justice and the Common Good Initiative |
| ★ California Native Plant Society, Santa Clara Valley Chapter | |

- ★ Extinction Rebellion SF Bay Area
- ★ First Unitarian Church of San Jose
- ★ Friends of Juristac
- ★ Green Foothills
- ★ Greenbelt Alliance
- ★ Human Agenda
- ★ Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley
- ★ Interfaith Clergy Alliance of South County
- ★ International Indian Treaty Council
- ★ International Indigenous Youth Council
- ★ Jewish Voice for Peace South Bay
- ★ Jews on Ohlone Land
- ★ La Raza Roundtable de California
- ★ Movimiento de Accion, Inspirando Servicio
- ★ Malaya South Bay
- ★ Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley
- ★ NAACP Santa Cruz
- ★ Native Voice TV
- ★ Nihonmachi Outreach Committee of San Jose
- ★ Northern California Environmental Justice Network
- ★ Novasutras
- ★ Orchard City Indivisible
- ★ People Acting in Community Together
- ★ Peninsula Peace and Justice Center
- ★ Pie Ranch
- ★ Raging Grannies Action League
- ★ Regeneración – Pajaro Valley Climate Action
- ★ Resource Center for Nonviolence
- ★ Romero Institute
- ★ Sacred Heart Community Service
- ★ San Jose Nikkei Resisters
- ★ San Jose Peace and Justice Center
- ★ San Jose Presbytery Peace & Justice Working Group
- ★ San Jose Strong
- ★ San José Unified Equity Coalition
- ★ Santa Clara County Single Payer Health Care Coalition
- ★ Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
- ★ Santa Cruz Climate Justice
- ★ SEIU Local 521
- ★ Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter
- ★ Silicon Valley De-Bug
- ★ Silicon Valley Democratic Socialists of America
- ★ Santa Cruz Democratic Socialists of America
- ★ Somos Mayfair
- ★ South Bay Indigenous Solidarity
- ★ South Bay Progressive Alliance
- ★ Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church of Hayward
- ★ Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) @ Sacred Heart
- ★ Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Santa Cruz County
- ★ Sunrise Movement Silicon Valley
- ★ Sustainable Silicon Valley
- ★ Temple Beth El
- ★ tUrn Climate Crisis Awareness & Action
- ★ UCSC American Indian Resource Center
- ★ Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sunnyvale
- ★ Unity with Nature Committee, Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
- ★ Urban Sanctuary of San Jose
- ★ UU Church of Monterey Peninsula Social Justice Committee
- ★ Veterans for Peace Chapter 101

BACKGROUND:

Juristac (“Place of the Big Head” in Mutsun language) is the heart of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band’s ancestral homeland, near Gilroy, CA. For thousands of years, the Amah Mutsun lived and held their most sacred ceremonies at Juristac.

Today, much of the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape is contained within the scenic Sargent Ranch property. A San Diego-based investor group applied to Santa Clara County for permits to establish a 403-acre sand and gravel mining operation on the property, with three [open-pit quarry sites](#) up to 250 feet deep, a 62-acre [processing plant](#), and a 1.6-mile long conveyor belt.

On July 22nd, Santa Clara County released a 650-page [Draft Environmental Impact Report](#) examining detrimental impacts the mine at Juristac would have on the environment and cultural resources. A 60-day public comment period is open now and ends on September 26th, offering the public an opportunity to review and submit written remarks on the Draft Environmental Impact Report.

The Draft Environmental Impact Report identified multiple *significant and unavoidable* harmful impacts that would result from the proposed mining project, including impacts pertaining to biological resources, air quality, traffic and tribal cultural resources (sacred sites) determined eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources.

The [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band](#) has steadfastly opposed the planned mine at Juristac since 2016, calling for public support and joining in coalition with a wide range of organizations. The proposed mine at Juristac/Sargent Ranch would destroy scenic grassland and oak woodland habitats and disrupt a critical landscape linkage for regional wildlife.

The Santa Clara County Human Rights Commission, California Democratic Party and ACLU of Northern California are among a [long list of organizations and institutions](#) that have authored letters or passed resolutions opposing the planned mine at Juristac. Over 20,000 members of the public have signed the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band's [petition to protect Juristac](#), when the online and handwritten petition signature count is combined. The City Councils of Morgan Hill, Gilroy, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Sunnyvale have each unanimously moved to oppose mining at Juristac/Sargent Ranch.

“Juristac is the heart of Amah Mutsun spirituality and culture, and an open-pit sand and gravel mine would forever desecrate this sacred place,” said **Valentin Lopez**, Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. “This mining project represents a continuation of the destruction and domination that our Amah Mutsun people have suffered for generations. The cultural survival of our tribe is at stake.”

The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and many allied organizations are engaging in widespread community mobilization efforts during the comment period, culminating in the *Rally for Juristac* in front of the County Administration building in San Jose.

About the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

The [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band](#) is comprised of descendants of the Indigenous peoples taken to the missions at San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz during Spanish colonization of California's Central Coast. The traditional territory of the Amah Mutsun encompasses all or portions of the modern counties of San Benito, Santa Clara, Monterey and Santa Cruz. Today's tribe represents the surviving descendant families of 20 distinct historic tribal groups, and currently has an enrolled membership of nearly 600 people.

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