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CC: Planning Commission, planning.commission@pln.sccgov.org

CC: Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, boardoperations@cob.sccgov.org

September 4, 2022

RE: Public Comment on the Sargent Ranch Quarry Project (Draft Environmental Impact Report, SCH #2016072058)

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Tsim Schneider. I'm an enrolled citizen of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, the sovereign and federally recognized tribe of Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo people whose ancestors faced and survived multiple phases of colonial violence and displacement by missionaries, soldiers, and settlers from Spain, Mexico, Russia, and the United States. I am also an associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where I teach courses on archaeology, colonialism, and Indigenous peoples of California. As an archaeologist and California Indian from a tribe that shares many similarities with the colonial history and resilience of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, I feel doubly compelled to write.

I am strongly opposed to the proposed and alternative plans for a sand and gravel mining operation, as outlined in the Sargent Ranch Quarry Draft Environmental Impact Report (July 2022), that would destroy a culturally significant Native American place, Juristac, in exchange for short-term profit and permanently alter more than 35 million cubic yards of earth, including Native American burials and sensitive cultural materials buried within and on top of the land. I have two general comments about aspects of the EIR document, as well as three specific remarks that draw more from my professional expertise and personal background.

In addition to the total destruction of a sacred Native American place, one particularly egregious component of the proposed project involves the sale of overburden (soil and rock) after being scraped away by heavy machinery (pg. 2.9). This troubling practice has a long history in the San Francisco Bay region where beginning in the late-1800s soil from many Native American shellmounds (ancient mounded village sites containing human cemeteries and cultural materials) was sold as “fertilizer” to local farms. Very few of the estimated 400+ shellmounds remain and, to this day, California Indian communities struggle to account for the whereabouts of ancestors previously interred in those holy spaces. Given the possibility of deeply buried and previously unrecorded archaeological deposits, **what efforts will be implemented to ensure that cultural material and human remains are not inadvertently disinterred and then sold?**

Concerning revegetation efforts throughout the duration of the mining project (pg. 2-51), the use of herbicides and managed grazing (presumably by cattle) speaks to the long-term harm caused by the mining operation beyond the immediate violence of destroying a sacred place. Chemicals, cows, and hydroseeding with soil supplements are shortsighted and inadequate solutions considering the many thousands of years of natural forces that have given shape to Juristac and the surrounding landform. They are also no replacement for Indigenous ecological knowledge and the hands and fires of Ohlone people who know best about how to manage and care for the land. **Minimally, developers should pause, think, and consult the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and research partners about more appropriate strategies for avoiding additional harm from this forthcoming ecological and cultural disaster.**

I have three additional observations to help foreground and put into perspective the Indigenous history of this important place. First, places and material belongings (artifacts) are one part of human cultures. For places like Juristac, it is crucial that planners, developers, and anyone choosing to support the proposed project consider a world beyond material things. As part of the environmental review process, archaeologists have provided a chronology and estimation of the kinds of activities associated with the property. This information allows agencies and local governments to assign a value to cultural resources and then make decisions about the significance of those places. Reducing cultures to dates and quantities (of artifacts, features, etc.) makes the destruction of places like the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape excusable. Where archaeology often falls short is connecting places and things to the people who chose to live at and continue to connect to those places. In my opinion, the ethnographic study makes an ironclad case for the remarkable and enduring persistence of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band to continue practicing their culture, honor their traditions, and safeguard the land for future generations at places like Juristac, even while missionaries, rancheros, settlers, and others have time and again taken steps to ignore or erase Ohlone peoples from the map. **Removing Juristac in its entirety or carving away pieces of this sacred place will forever and irreversibly compromise the power and wisdom invested in the place by ancestors, refugees evading missions, Big Head dancers, and current and future members of the Amah Mutsun community who hope to visit and learn from this place.**

Second, as a citizen of a California tribe I feel compelled to illuminate another overlooked “cumulative impact” (Section 3.1.2) at the heart of the Sargent Ranch Quarry Project: the

sustained effects and ongoing harm of colonialism for Native Americans. The sale and proposed destruction of Sargent Ranch by private companies and landowners is possible today because of the theft of land and kidnapping, forced labor, and murder of California Indians during the nineteenth century. The brutality of Mexican and American regimes, which forced California Indians—Ohlone peoples among them—to conceal their identities and find protection at undetected places largely beyond the gaze of settlers (often within “rural unincorporated areas” [pg. 3.5-12]) was, in turn, the result of more than four decades of cultural warfare waged by Catholic missionaries from Spain. **Just as developers must consider the cumulative impacts of different project components, county planners should consider their role in either sustaining a longstanding pattern of harmful and compounding impacts from colonialism, or choosing to break the cycle of disenfranchisement, dispossession, and cultural violence against Ohlone peoples.** As urban spaces closer to San Francisco Bay have now almost entirely erased from view any sign of Indigenous cultural presence (archaeological sites, like shellmounds), it is precisely places like Juristac—*La Brea*, Betevel Bluff, *Maksahjah*, CA-SCL-577/H, -578/H, and more—that allow us to see, understand, and help celebrate Ohlone resilience.

Third, looking beyond Sargent Ranch, I conclude my comments by gesturing toward the growing number of examples in California and beyond of local governments, agencies, private land owners, and others who are working productively with Native American tribes to protect, steward, and restore stolen Indigenous homelands. National Parks, State Parks, land trusts, and many other agencies are designing and implementing co-management agreements with Native American tribes to better protect and interpret natural resources and cultural places that have suffered from centuries of neglect. Governing bodies and oversight boards increasingly include Indigenous community partners as key stakeholders in decisions about protecting or cautiously developing sacred lands. These and still other examples of returning land to dispossessed Native American communities should spark and inspire discussion about collaborative commitments to county planning in service to social justice. **By opposing the Sargent Ranch Quarry Project, the County of Santa Clara will be choosing to honor the presence and future of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and prioritizing cooperation and redress over greed and the careless destruction of our planet.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter and to share my concerns about the Sargent Ranch Quarry Project.

Sincerely,

Tsim D. Schneider, Ph.D.
Santa Cruz, California