

Catherine Guschewsky, Presiding Officer  
Environmental Quality Council

May 17/09

In the matter of the objection  
To the small mine permit of  
2M Construction inc., TFN 5 6/053  
Docket No. 09-4802

To the Council:

Eric Anderson and I met with members of your council on May 1, 2009 and testified as to our reasons for objecting to the proposed 80 acre mine site.

I fully realize that the issues I address in this correspondence may not meet the deadline for a formal protest, but offer these thoughts for future events.

I have lived on the Willow Bow Ranch since 1974; each of the past 35 years has been a learning experience. I have learned that the river bottom is the ecological center of our natural population of all birds especially waterfowl, Raptors, large and small animals. As spring evolved into summer this year I note that some very striking differences exist this year that contrast with the past history of the area as I know it.

Every spring the Willow Bow has been visited by Bald and Golden Eagles. In 2008 we had over 20 Bald Eagles in the cottonwood trees that surround our lambing pasture. As a result of their interest in our lamb crop, the only lambs we raised were those that were kept in our yard. The eagles harvested over 98 % of our lamb crop. I called the Game and Fish office; they sent a trapper to evaluate the situation. He noted the large population of Bald Eagles but felt that we could not prove the depredation of our lambs was due to the Eagles. This year we only had one Bald Eagle visit and our ewes produced a good crop of lambs. It is not that I wish the eagles had been here again this spring, but I wonder why they did not visit as the usually do? Is it the mining operation that changed the migrating pattern of the Bald eagles? I don't know and wonder if anyone else knows or cares.

The report stated that the federal game and fish officers had signed off on the gravel pit as not being harmful to the ecosystem – I did not talk to them, nor did anyone else I know before their evaluation was accepted by the Environmental Quality Council. They evaluate the river ecosystem from an airplane on a regular basis; some foot work may provide better information. I feel they could have acted on better information if they had talked to individuals who live in the immediate area.

Every spring the Willow Bow has been visited by thousands of Cliff Swallows, so far this year we were visited by one pair. Why? I don't know but I feel this is a significant difference and along with the change in the Bald Eagles annual visit I wonder if it may be possible that the small 10 acre pit has not already made a difference and wonder what the impact of future development may be.

As I stated before in my first letter, the river in the immediate vicinity of the gravel pit is a major winter resting place for thousands of geese and other waterfowl. They have wintered in this location for as long as I have lived here. Again I ask if this issue has been addressed.

I feel that more time and effort is needed when determining the effect of any operations along our rivers. I had not noticed the difference between last year and this year in time to address these issues in my protest as not enough time had passed for me to fully become cognizant of the potential impact of the mining operation through late winter and early spring. I believe that a full year between the first 10 acre mine and the application for increased operation should be included when major water systems are involved. As this would allow local residents time to evaluate the potential impact of further development. Personal contact by the federal or state agencies with local residents could also result in increased information upon which the council will make their decisions.

I do not feel that the initial environmental impact study was adequate and that the impact of the mining operation needs further consideration.

I most sincerely thank you for the opportunity to correspond with you over this issue.

Most Sincerely  
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