

Introduction

This section describes the affected environment and regulatory setting for mineral resources, and potential impacts on mineral resources that would result from implementation of the project.

The project is located in a region underlain by sporadic deposits of minerals, sedimentary basins, oil wells, and geothermal resources. The project has the greatest potential to affect oil wells and sedimentary basins, as those are the closest to the project alignment. However, impacts are considered less than significant because the proposed project will affect a small area and does not cross areas currently used to extract known mineral resources. Section 4.6 discusses geotechnical and appropriate engineering and construction measures that will further ensure that potential impacts on mineral resources will be less than significant.

Methodology

Existing conditions were determined from a review of published literature, examination of aerial photographs, and site-specific field inspection of the locations of project components. Descriptions of mineral resources in the project area were derived from published mapping by USGS; DOGGR; and the State of California, Department of Conservation, California Geological Survey (CGS).

Affected Environment

Regulatory Setting

No federal plans or policies concerning mineral resources apply to the proposed project.

State of California

California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act

The primary State law concerning conservation and development of mineral resources is the California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) of 1975, as amended to date. SMARA was enacted in 1975 to limit new development in areas with significant mineral deposits. SMARA is found in the California Public Resources Code (PRC), Division 2, Chapter 9, Section 2710 et seq.

Depending on the region, natural resources can include geologic deposits of valuable minerals used in manufacturing processes and in the production of construction materials. SMARA calls for the State Geologist to classify the lands within California based on mineral resource availability. Furthermore, SMARA states that the extraction of minerals is essential to the continued economic well-being of the State and to the needs of society, and that reclamation of mined lands is necessary to prevent or minimize adverse effects on the environment and to protect the public health and safety (Section 2711).

In addition to SMARA, the California Health and Safety Code requires the covering, filling, or fencing of abandoned shafts, pits, and excavations (Sections 24400–03). Mining also may be regulated by local government, which has the authority to prohibit mining pursuant to its general plan and local zoning laws.

Project Setting

Existing Mineral Resources

CGS has classified the regional significance of mineral resources in accordance with SMARA. Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs) delineated by CGS identify the presence and significance of mineral deposits within the project area. In general, areas subject to pressures of urbanization are zoned by CGS, while areas not subject to pressures of urbanization are not. MRZ categories defined by CGS are presented below:

MRZ-1: Areas where adequate information indicates that no significant mineral deposits are present, or where it is judged that little likelihood exists for their presence.

MRZ-2: Areas where adequate information indicates that significant mineral deposits are present, or where it is judged that a high likelihood exists for their presence.

MRZ-3: Areas containing mineral deposits, the significance of which cannot be evaluated from available data.

MRZ-4: Areas where available information is inadequate for assignment to any other MRZ.

SZ: Areas containing unique or rare occurrence of rocks, minerals, or fossils that are of outstanding scientific significance.

San Benito County

In compliance with SMARA, CGS has mapped mineral resources throughout San Benito County and its cities, including Hollister. The northern portion of the San Benito County, in which the proposed project is located, has been designated and classified as having significant aggregate resources. These aggregate resources are labeled by the California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) as significant MRZ-2 and possibly significant MRZ-3. There are sand and gravel resources along Tres Pinos Creek (approximately 8 miles southeast of the proposed project alignments) and portions of the San Benito River north of its tributary with Tres Pinos.

The sand and gravel deposits of the San Benito River are among the principal economic minerals within the County (County of San Benito 1994). They are presently being mined in a number of locations; however, none of these locations is near, or crosses, the proposed project alignments.

Figure 4.10-1 depicts the approximate location of MRZ-2 designations. Although other categories (MRZ-1, 3, and 4) are present, MRZ-2 is identified as having confirmed significant mineral deposits, and is recognized in County Policy 20.

City of Hollister

The Natural Resources and Conservation Element of the Hollister General Plan designates portions of the city and its sphere of influence as having construction aggregate deposits (sand, gravel, and crushed rock) of regional significance. Increased development within the region is likely to create a growing demand for these aggregate deposits (City of Hollister 2005).

City of San Juan Bautista

The City of San Juan Bautista General Plan indicates that no State-designated mineral resources are within the community's planning area: "Although San Juan Bautista's history has been shaped by mining 'booms,' there are no State-designated mineral resources within the Planning Area. The abandoned Pearce Quarry, five miles south of the City, was used by the Ideal Cement Company for limestone and granite mining until the cement plant closed in the 1970s. The riverbed of the San Benito River, three miles north of the City, is considered an important sand and gravel resource." (City of San Juan Bautista 1998.)

Monterey County

Sand, gravel, and petroleum are the primary mineral resources extracted in Monterey County. Although Monterey County contains useful minerals, the elaborate and intricate geology caused by widespread faulting and deformation in the area makes mineral investigation and determination difficult. According to the Monterey County General Plan Draft Program Environmental Impact Report, no CGS-designated MRZs are located in the area of the proposed project alignment that is within Monterey County (Michael Brandman Associates 2006).

Sand and Gravel Quarries

The proposed project will not cross areas that are presently being used for mineral extraction. However, the project is within an area identified by the San Benito County General Plan as a potential future aggregate resource extraction site. In addition, some areas in the vicinity of the proposed project are in production in the San Benito Riverbed between Hollister and San Juan Bautista, as well as near Prunedale. See Figure 4.10-1.

Oil and Minerals

Three areas designated as potential oil fields do exist near the City of Hollister, within its sphere of influence (see Figure 4.10-1). Specifically, all three of these oil fields are located west of the city and north of Highway 156. However, only one of the oil fields is directly on the alignment path, located between Poles 19/00 and 20/01 of the Hollister Pole Segment. Additionally, sedimentary basins with oil, gas, and/or geothermal production are found in the County of San Benito and in the City of San Juan Bautista (DOGGR 2001). Furthermore, within San Benito County, in the San Benito River, there are State-designated MRZ-2 zones in which significant mineral resources are present. The proposed project realignment occurring at the San Benito River between Poles 14/13 and 15/01 will cross this MRZ-2 zone.

Geothermal Resources

No geothermal resources are located within the project alignment. The nearest geothermal resource is a geothermal spring in Santa Clara County, near the northeast border of San Benito County (DOGGR 2002).

Environmental Effects

This section describes the impacts of the proposed project and lists the thresholds used to conclude whether a potential impact would be significant. Measures to mitigate potentially significant impacts accompany each impact discussion.

Significance Criteria

For this analysis, an impact pertaining to mineral resources was considered significant under CEQA if it would result in any of the following environmental effects; these criteria are based on professional practice and Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.):

- Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state; or
- Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Potential loss of availability of a known mineral resource – less-than-significant impact

Extraction operations exist outside the proposed project alignment area. The only portion of the alignment that does cross a known mineral resource occurs between Poles 14/13 and 15/01, where the Proposed River Crossing route crosses a portion of San Benito River that is designated as MRZ-2 for aggregate materials. No aggregate extraction is occurring at this point, and neither the existing poles nor the reconfigured poles in the proposed project will obstruct or affect any future ability to access the river for any purpose. Construction in these areas will be temporary. The potential for the project to result in the loss of a known state or regionally valuable mineral resource is low; therefore, this potential impact is considered less than significant.

Potential loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site – less-than-significant impact

The County of San Benito, in addition to recognizing State-designated MRZ zones, has acknowledged the San Benito River as a locally important mineral resource. Specifically, the portion of the alignment that crosses the San Benito River between Poles 14/13 and 15/01 is within a locally important mineral resource area of San Benito County. However, the pole replacement activities from the proposed project will affect only a very small area, and the Proposed River Crossing does not cross areas currently used to extract known mineral resources. Thus, the proposed project will result in less-than-significant impacts to locally important mineral resources.

References

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- Michael Brandman Associates. 2006. *Monterey County General Plan: Draft Program Environmental Impact Report*. (State Clearinghouse Number 2006021054.) San Ramon, CA.