

## Opposing a Proposed Gravel Strip Mine on La Bajada Mesa

An application before the County of Santa Fe would permit a massive, 50-acre gravel strip mine on the top of La Bajada Mesa near I-25, fifteen miles south of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Although the CDRC recommended denial, the application now goes to the Board of County Commissioners. We need your help to stop this desecration before it is allowed to start.

The picture below shows La Bajada Mesa from a location to the southeast. The proposed mine would be in the middle of the light-colored mesa top.



Historian William Baxter says about La Bajada, “There is no more important geographical landmark in our State, and none with more historical significance.” Yet the proposed mine would defile this historic, cultural, and scenic landmark for gravel. Proposed mining operations would include 25 years of blasting, crushers, screeners, conveyors, truck traffic, and night-time lighting in a currently undeveloped and highly visible location. In return, the application estimates only seven full time jobs and \$122,500 annual gross receipts tax—numbers which a leading economist feels are significantly overstated.

Mining requires water. Unconscionably, the County has agreed to sell nearly a million gallons per year of scarce, potable water for dust control. This water would be hauled by truck from the County Water Utilities on Hwy 14 to the mine site on the mesa. In the midst of record-setting drought and with the prospect of ongoing reductions in Southwestern rainfall, allowing any water—potable or not—to be used to turn a beloved landmark into unneeded gravel would be a travesty. Such a decision would also establish a foolish precedent if other industrial applicants seek water in the future.

The mining operations would impact near-by wildlife corridors and would be highly visible to local residents and to visitors. Noise, dust, and impacted views affect hundreds of square miles surrounding the site, the I-25 “Gateway to Santa Fe”, the acclaimed Cerrillos Hills State Park, the Galisteo parklands, the Turquoise Trail Scenic By-way, and places along the historic Camino Real de Adentro (the colonial trade route to Mexico City, now overseen by the National Park Service and BLM).

There simply is no need for another gravel mine. Current stockpiles of gravel and resources at existing mines far exceed demand. The Caja Del Rio Quarry near the County landfill produces basalt gravel, uses piped effluent water, and will create a site that can be filled with county refuse. The County should not permit a new strip mine to mar La Bajada Mesa when other, more sensible, options already exist.

Here are some of the factors that make it critical to deny this proposed strip mine application:

- The current application estimates using 18 million gallons of potable water for dust control over 25 years. However, this is likely a gross underestimate of the amount that would be needed, based on information from other comparable mining operations.
- The sale of water, whether potable or not, for private mining and industrial purposes is a dangerous precedent for the County to establish. This is not the best use of a diminishing water resource that will be critical to meet the future needs of all residents.
- If the County agrees to rezone these 50 acres for mining, the adjacent lands on top of the mesa would become undesirable for less intrusive and intensive uses. Approval would establish a precedent to engulf more of the mesa in destructive mining. Previously denied applications sought mining zones up to two miles long on the mesa top. The property is currently for sale on the international market, describing this historic landmark as “5,200+/- acres of aggregate.”
- This proposal rushes to establish this mining zone use before the new Santa Fe County Sustainable Growth Management Plan takes effect, and before action can be completed on a proposed National Monument status for La Bajada Mesa.
- For 25 years, dust from the mining activities would affect surrounding properties and those downwind for miles. This includes the acclaimed Cerrillos Hills State Park, from whose planned gateway (Waldo Canyon Road) the proposed operations would be fully visible.
- The ongoing noise from the blasting, digging, grinding, and pulverizing of the basalt cap into gravel would significantly change the pervading quiet in the Cerrillos Hills State Park and for property owners for hundreds of square miles around this proposed operation. Light pollution from security lights at night will also be an unwelcome intrusion.
- The costs of maintaining County, State, and Interstate roads from the pounding of mine and water trucks for 25 years would be paid by taxpayers for the private benefit of the applicants.
- Benefits to the County and the local economy are minimal. The application estimates seven jobs and \$122,500 in annual gross receipts taxes. A leading economist challenges both figures as significantly overstated; new jobs and taxes here will reduce current jobs and taxes from existing mines.
- The proposed site borders important wildlife corridors and sits within the Galisteo Watershed. It is flanked by two drainages, with the Galisteo Creek below, leading to the Rio Grande.
- Finally, tourism is an important part of our economy. Tourists don't come to see strip mines. A New York Times article says: *“La Bajada Hill...is still one of those approaches, those arrivals, that seem mythical, impossibly grand...a place that could change not only one's external life but also one's inner, spiritual life...‘You will never be the same again.’”*

In summary, La Bajada Mesa is an important historic, cultural, and natural landmark, prominently visible for miles, that deserves to be protected and preserved for the benefit of all residents and visitors, not strip-mined to enrich a few individuals.

**Status:** The County case manager recommended that the County Development Review Committee (CDRC) approve the application. After reviewing the facts and hearing an overwhelming outcry from the public, the CDRC recommended denial. This is **NOT** over. The application now goes to the Board of County Commissioners for a final decision. The date of this hearing will be announced on our website.

**Action steps to help protect La Bajada Mesa:** Tell all your friends and contacts!

- Attend the Board of County Commissioners hearing. Public turnout was critical to the CDRC's recommendation to deny. Watch [www.SaveLaBajada.org](http://www.SaveLaBajada.org) or Facebook for the date of the hearing.
- Sign our petition: <http://bit.ly/LaBajadaPetition>
- Volunteer to help or get on our mailing list for updates: [savelabajada@gmail.com](mailto:savelabajada@gmail.com)
- “Like” us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Savelabajada](http://www.facebook.com/Savelabajada)
- Get current information and more details: <http://www.SaveLaBajada.org>
- Donate money: <http://www.gofundme.com/savelabajada>