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Sunol's activist groups join forces

By Chris Metinko

SUNOL - They don't want quarries, nor a composting facility. What they want is for their tiny hamlet to maintain its rural character and history, and they're willing to band together to prove it.

"I think this is a very disturbing time," said Pat Stillman, 75, a 35-year resident of Sunol and head of the grass-roots Save Our Sunol group. "Just when we thought we had more protections -- with Measure D -- it seems the county is always trying to dump things on us, literally."

It is that feeling that has caused Stillman's group and two other activist groups in the area -- Stop the Dump in Sunol and the Alameda Creek Alliance -- to start a coalition that hopes to intensify the groups' efforts to protect open space and wildlife habitat of the Sunol Valley.

The groups are uniting to combat two quarries and a compost facility approved by Alameda County. SOS and SDS each have about 70 members, while the alliance has 670, though many are based elsewhere.

Stillman said the impetus to start the coalition came when the groups got together and examined the impacts these project combined would have on Sunol. Instead of looking at each project's individual impacts. For instance, Stillman said the Apperson Ridge Quarry -- which the alliance has been battling -- will put as many as 1,000 trucks per day on Calaveras Road in Sunol. When combined with the truck traffic from the proposed expanded Mission Valley Rock quarry -- which recently was bought by the larger Hanson Aggregates Mid-Pacific Inc. -- and with the Alameda County Waste Management Authority's proposed compost facility on Andrade Road, the effects are much more dramatic.

"We looked at the impacts of all these projects and realized there are greater impacts to Sunol when all these are combined than when you look at them separately," Stillman said.

Sunol, a small unincorporated rural hamlet of slightly more than 1,000 residents just to the south of Pleasanton, rarely lacks for controversy. Stillman and her group's fight to prevent Mission Valley Rock from excavating a 240-foot deep gravel pit over the next 45 years is going on its 15th year. In 2003, SOS's lawsuit against the proposed expansion of the quarry was denied and just last February the California Supreme Court declined to review the case. Before that, it fought to keep the Renaissance Pleasure Faire from pitching its tents near Sunol.

Nevertheless, Stillman said her group will continue to explore other legal options and plans to alert both San Francisco -- the City of San Francisco and the quarry sits on -- and Alameda counties of permits it feels the owners are missing to operate.

"We certainly feel this is an important time," Stillman said. "And we're very disturbed by what is going on."