



November 25, 2024

Palo Alto City Council
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Via email: city.council@CityofPaloAlto.org

Re: Agenda Item 19, 12/2/24 City Council meeting

Dear Mayor Stone and Council Members,

The undersigned organizations respectfully submit these comments in support of Council Member Lydia Kou and Mayor Stone's Colleague's Memo, and ask you to approve the **Resolution Supporting the Efforts of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band to Preserve Juristac/Sargent Ranch as Open Space**. We are nonprofit and community groups joining together to support the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in this effort, and we represent thousands of members in the region, including in the City of Palo Alto.

Similar resolutions have already been approved by the City Councils of [Gilroy](#), [Morgan Hill](#), [Mountain View](#), [Santa Clara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), and [Sunnyvale](#), and by the [County of Santa Cruz](#). In addition, more than 25,000 people have signed a [petition](#) in support of protecting Juristac, and over 100 current and former elected officials, community leaders, and nonprofit organizations have signed on to the [Statement of Opposition to Sargent Ranch Quarry](#). We respectfully request that the City Council take action to pass this resolution to support the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in the protection of this culturally important landscape, and to protect the critical wildlife linkage and habitat at Juristac.

Juristac: Sacred to the Indigenous Community, Critical for Wildlife Movement

Juristac lies at the heart of the ancestral lands of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. The portion of Juristac known today as "Sargent Ranch" encompasses 5,200 acres located at the very southern border of Santa Clara County, southwest of Gilroy (see image below). For thousands of years, the Amah Mutsun people held sacred ceremonies at this location -- the home of a

powerful spiritual being known as Kuksui. Juristac translates to “Place of the Big Head,” and the Big Head dances associated with Kuksui and other healing and renewal ceremonies took place here over the centuries. Juristac was a gathering place for many tribes in the area, and its spiritual and cultural significance to the Indigenous community is unique in our region. (For more details on the history and the cultural and spiritual significance of Juristac, please visit ProtectJuristac.org.)

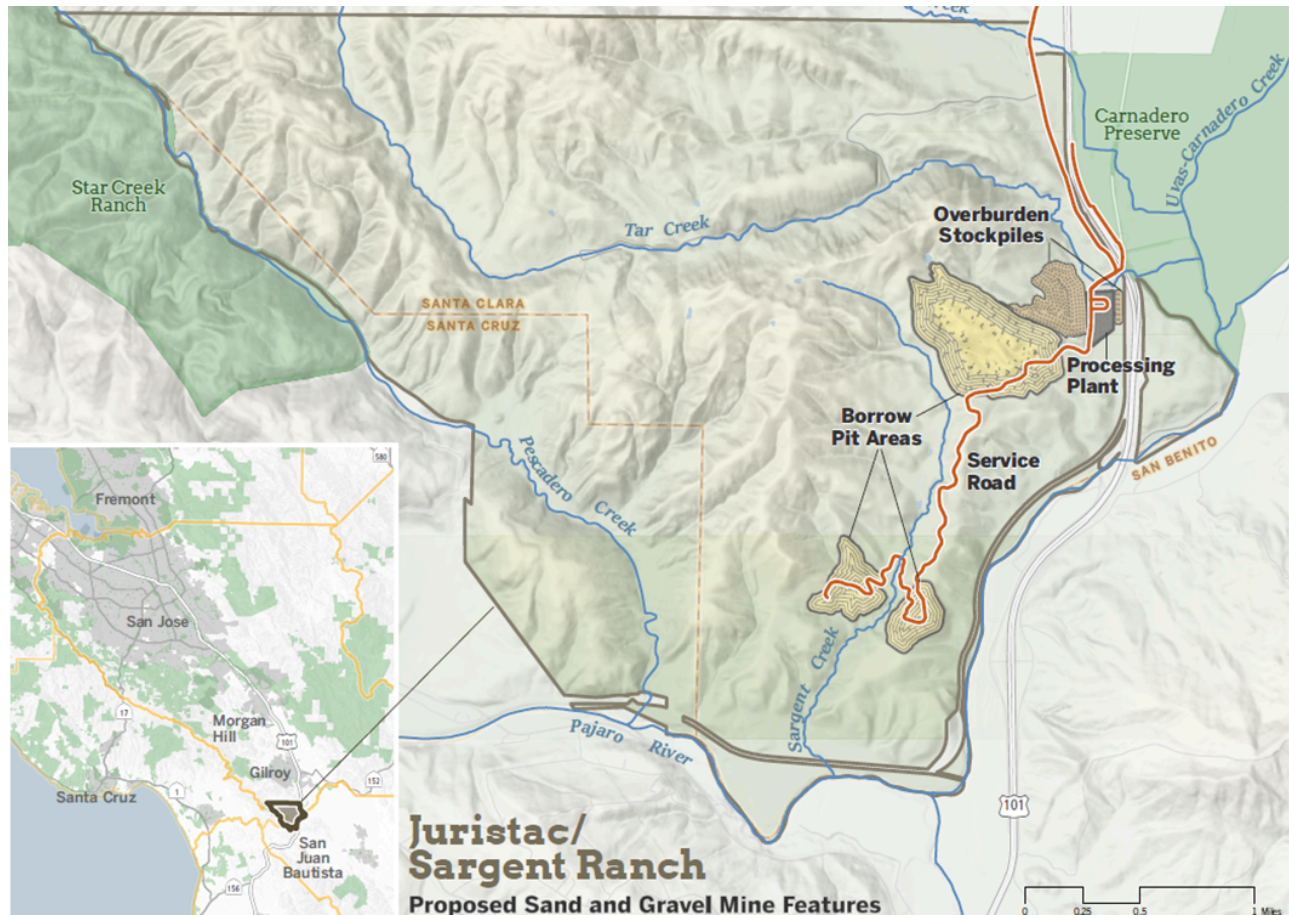


Image created by GreenInfo Network.

In addition, Juristac is a critical wildlife corridor that links the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Gabilan Range to the south and the Diablo Range to the east. This area has been identified as an important migration route in all habitat connectivity assessments for the region since the year 2000.¹ The Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency recognizes several landscape linkages running

¹ See, e.g., Diamond, TD, A Sandoval, NP Sharma, ME Vernon, PD Cowan, AP Clevenger, and SC Lockwood. 2022. *Enhancing ecological connectivity and safe passage for wildlife on highways between the southern Santa Cruz Mountains, Gabilan Range, and Diablo Range in California*. Pathways for Wildlife and Peninsula Open Space Trust; Penrod K, Hunter R, Merrifield M (2001) *Missing Linkages: Restoring Connectivity to the California Landscape*. South Coast Wildlands Project, Los Angeles; Spencer, W.D., Beier, P., Penrod, K., Parisi, M., Pettler, A., Winters, K., Stritholt, J., Paulman, C. and Rustigian-Romsos, H., 2010, *California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project: A strategy for conserving a connected California*. Report prepared

through the Sargent Ranch property (linkages 12, 18, 19 and 20 on [this map](#)). The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority considers the “Sargent Hills” area to be one of its top 10 conservation focus areas (number 8 on [this map](#)).

The Threat to Juristac: An Open-Pit Sand and Gravel Mine

The current owner of the property, the San Diego-based Debt Acquisition Company of America, has submitted an application to the County of Santa Clara for a sand and gravel open-pit mining operation on 400 acres of pristine hillside grassland at Juristac. According to the [Draft Environmental Impact Report \(DEIR\)](#), the Sargent Ranch Quarry would operate for 30 years, include three pits hundreds of feet deep, and pump about 86,000 gallons of groundwater per day for quarry operations. The quarry would permanently alter the Juristac landscape, turning hillsides into deep pits and scarring the landscape with truck haul roads, conveyor belts, and a 14-acre processing plant. Further information about the quarry proposal can be found on [Santa Clara County’s webpage about the Sargent Ranch Quarry project](#).

[Over 10,000 public comments were submitted](#) to the County in response to the DEIR. Of these, the vast majority (99.9%) strongly opposed the mine and urged the County to deny the project.

The County is currently in the process of reviewing those 10,000+ comments in preparation for releasing the final EIR. According to the County’s best estimate, the Sargent Ranch Quarry project may come to a vote before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors by mid to late 2025.

The Sargent Ranch Mine Would Destroy the Sacred Indigenous Landscape of Juristac

As part of the DEIR process, the County commissioned an ethnographic study of the Sargent Ranch project area. That study documented known historic resources, including human burials dating from thousands of years ago, and determined that there is a high likelihood of currently-unknown buried prehistoric cultural sites very near to the processing plant and other active areas of the quarry. In addition, the DEIR identified the entire Juristac landscape, including the entire quarry area, as a cultural resource to be protected. The DEIR found that construction and operation of the Sargent Ranch Quarry project would result in “permanent and irreversible alterations to the physical landscape of the JTCL [Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape]. These alterations would significantly diminish the emotional and spiritual associations held by the Tribe to this cultural landscape through the destruction of the sacred and spiritual qualities that qualify the JTCL as a TCR [Tribal Cultural Resource].” DEIR, p.

for California Department of Transportation and California Department of Fish and Game; Bay Area Open Space Council 2011, *The Conservation Lands Network: San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project Report*, Berkeley, CA; Penrod, K., Garding, P.E., Paulman, C., Beier, P., Weiss, S., Schaefer, N., Branciforte, R. and Gaffney, K., 2013, *Critical Linkages: Bay Area & Beyond*. Produced by Science & Collaboration for Connected Wildlands, Fair Oaks, CA [www.scwildlands.org], in collaboration with the Bay Area Open Space Council’s Conservation Lands Network [www.BayAreaLands.org].

3.5-42. There is no way to mitigate these permanent and irreversible impacts to the Juristac landscape as a whole, as well as to known cultural, historic and paleontological sites.

The Sargent Ranch Mine Would Destroy Juristac's Biodiversity, Wildlife Corridors, and Watershed

As highlighted in Mayor Stone's and Council Member Kou's Colleague's Memo, Juristac contains [essential foraging habitat for the endangered California Condor](#), as well as prime habitat for other at-risk species. Threatened California red-legged frogs live and breed in Sargent Creek, which flows directly adjacent to two of the mining pits. The streams and ponds of Juristac are habitat for threatened California tiger salamanders and western pond turtles, and steelhead trout have been observed in Tar Creek on the Juristac site. Golden eagles have been observed foraging on the hillsides, and burrowing owls have been observed in the grasslands. Thus, Juristac is rich in biodiversity and critical habitat for a wide variety of species, including threatened and endangered species.

The ecological impact of the proposed Sargent Ranch sand and gravel mine on Juristac would be especially severe for species such as mountain lions, which depend on the ability to migrate through this site for healthy population dynamics. Heavy industry such as mining causes disruption to animal movement due not only to the disturbed footprint of the project but also due to the daily noise and heavy vehicle activity, which can drive away sensitive wildlife species and prevent them from utilizing their usual migration routes. In this case, the proposed footprint of the mining operation lies directly across the main migration route for animals out of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Highway 101 is a significant barrier for wildlife movement, and there are only a few undercrossings beneath the highway where animals can travel. The DEIR found that the quarry would have a significant and unavoidable impact on wildlife movement.

The Sargent Ranch Quarry could also severely impact the local watershed. According to the DEIR, the quarry pits would excavate the hillsides on both sides of Sargent Creek. This creek is a tributary to the Pajaro River, which is already heavily impacted from runoff and illegal dumping. The Sargent Creek watershed encompasses over 1200 acres and is estimated to provide hundreds of acre-feet of groundwater recharge and runoff. If the pits excavate below the water table, the integrity of the Sargent Creek watershed would be affected and its ability to recharge groundwater significantly impaired. Sargent Creek supports a rare stream-dwelling population of California red-legged frogs, a federally listed threatened species, which could be significantly impacted by the disruption, increased sediment, and other impacts to the creek and the watershed.

Please Join Us To Support Protecting Juristac

By approving the resolution, the City of Palo Alto will join the cities of [Gilroy](#), [Morgan Hill](#), [Mountain View](#), [Santa Clara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), and [Sunnyvale](#), and by the [County of Santa Cruz](#), in showing public support for protecting Juristac. More than 25,000 people have already signed a [petition](#) in support of protecting Juristac, and over 100 current and former elected officials, community leaders, and nonprofit organizations have signed on to the [Statement of Opposition](#)

[to Sargent Ranch Quarry](#). We urge the Council to join with us to demonstrate to the County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors that the leaders and communities of Santa Clara County are standing with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in opposition to the Sargent Ranch Quarry and in support of protecting Juristac.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Alice Kaufman
Policy and Advocacy Director
Green Foothills

Athena Hernandez
General Counsel
Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate
Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance

Mike Ferreira
Chapter Chair
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Victorina Arvelo
South Bay Resilience Manager
Greenbelt Alliance

Karah Fisher
Conservation Advocacy & Outreach Senior Coordinator
California Native Plant Society

Judy Fenerty
Conservation Chair
California Native Plant Society, Santa Clara Valley Chapter

Emma Hartung along with SURJ Coordinating Committee
Facilitator, SURJ SCC's campaign to Protect Juristac
Showing Up for Racial Justice Santa Clara County

Kristi Iverson
Steering Committee, Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice
Action Council Chair, Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto