

Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)

Granite Construction Company – Mad River Aggregate Extraction
Johnson, Blue Lake, Emmerson, and Graham Bars
(WDID 1B02120WNHU)

Humboldt County

On April 4, 2005, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Granite Construction Company (applicant) requesting Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for Mad River aggregate extraction operations at the Johnson Bar, Blue Lake Bar and Emmerson Bar located near the City of Blue Lake, and the Graham Bar located near the City of Arcata. The proposed projects will cause disturbances to the waters of the United States associated with the Mad River in the Mad River Hydrologic Unit No. 109.00.

The Johnson Bar is located in Sections 19 and 30, T6N, R2E, and portions of Sections 24 and 25, T6N, R1E, H.B. & M. The Blue Lake Bar is located in portions of Sections 19 and 30, T6 N, R2E, and portions of Sections 24 and 25, T6N, R1E, H.B. & M. The Emmerson Bar is located within Section 30, T6N, R2E, H.B. & M. The Graham Bar is located (Sections 8, 16, and 17, T7N, R1E, H.B & M) adjacent to Granite's asphalt and aggregate processing plant on Giuntoli Lane in Arcata. Aggregate extraction operations at the Johnson Bar, Blue Lake Bar, and Emmerson Bar have been ongoing since the 1960's. Operations at the Graham Bar have been intermittent since the 1960's. These aggregate extraction operations are regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) Letter of Permission procedure pursuant to Clean Water Act Section 404. In 2004, the ACOE issued a five-year Section 404 permit authorizing the applicant to annually extract up to 52,850 cubic yards of aggregate from these gravel bars and to construct summer low-flow channel crossings as needed. The entire bank full channel area may be subject to aggregate extraction depending on site-specific conditions and seasonal aggregate recruitment.

The Blue Lake Bar and Emmerson Bar have maintained several extraction areas in recent years. The Johnson Bar has maintained one extraction area. No aggregate extraction has occurred on the Graham Bar since the early to mid 1990s. Small-scale extraction activities may be conducted at the Graham Bar on both sides of the river in the near future. An existing low-flow bridge crossing provides access to both sides of the river at the Graham Bar. Existing haul roads are used to access these gravel bars. The haul roads are primarily over exposed, unvegetated areas of the gravel bars or through established routes through riparian vegetation. Occasionally a haul road requires passage over an area of annual vegetation. Impacts to mature woody vegetation are avoided and there is typically no need to extend any haul road through riparian vegetation. When the river meanders and the gravel bars shift locations, the applicant may install temporary railcar bridge crossings over the main channel following approval by the ACOE. Watering of haul roads is conducted as needed during the dry periods to control fugitive dust.

Aggregate extraction on these bars is typically conducted with rubber-tired scrapers. Scrapers are driven through the area of extraction and remove up to 15 to 17 cubic yards of aggregate on each pass by excavating up to six inches off the surface. Trenching, alcoves, wetland pits and horseshoe extractions are other extraction methods authorized by the ACOE at times when those

methods of extraction are preferred. A large excavator, scrapers and/or dump trucks are used when trenching type excavations are authorized. Aggregate material excavated below the water table is temporarily stockpiled away from the wet channel to prevent runoff from entering the river. When the material is adequately dry it is transported to designated stockpile areas.

After the applicant has removed the aggregate to the approved extraction design lines and grades, the extraction area is regraded as necessary to leave no depressions or berms that may potentially trap fish or cause impacts to surrounding habitats. The applicant's consultant will conduct a site visit at the conclusion of extraction operations and provide any additional recommendations reflecting seasonal extraction plan and reclamation plan conformity. When the final surfaces of the site are graded for seasonal reclamation, the operator may remove the summer crossings and leave the bankfull channel area to the natural reclamation process, which occurs during the high flow events of the following winter. The extraction season typically ends on October 15, unless agencies agree to grant an extension of the season. The applicant will implement mitigation and impact avoidance measures during the aggregate extraction processes including; maintaining vertical and horizontal offset from the live channel to ensure low-flow channel confinement, maintaining sufficient water depth for fish, minimizing impacts to water quality, limiting the number of haul roads providing access to the channel extraction areas, and minimizing the need for temporary stream crossings when practicable.

The applicant conducts aggregate extraction operations under conditions of the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for aggregate removal from the Mad River. The County of Humboldt, as the lead California Environmental Quality Act agency, certified the EIR on May 31, 1994. The applicant applies for Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreements (1600 Agreement) from the California Department of Fish and Game (CDF&G) on an annual basis after receiving approval of their annual extraction plans by the County of Humboldt Extraction Review Team, CDF&G, ACOE, and NOAA Fisheries.

Regional Water Board staff is proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act Authority. This project may be eligible for coverage by the proposed *General Waste Discharge Requirements and Water Quality Certification for Discharges Related to Sand and Gravel Mining, Excavation, and Processing Activities, Including Asphalt and Concrete Operations, on Non-Federal Lands in the North Coast Region* (General WDRs). The Regional Water Board will hold a hearing to consider the General WDRs for adoption on June 21, 2005. The decision to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 or the proposed General WDRs will be made following the Regional Water Board hearing in June. In addition, staff will consider all comments received during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Regional Water Board staff Dean Prat by phone at (707) 576-2801, or email dprat@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.