

May 2, 2007

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

**Mercer-Fraser Company  
Essex Gravel Extraction Operations  
WDID No. 1B02101WNHU**

**Humboldt County**

On July 11, 2005, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Mercer-Fraser Company requesting Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for gravel mining operations at Essex Bar located on the Mad River near Arcata, Humboldt County. The proposed projects will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with the Mad River in the Mad River Hydrologic Area No. 109.00.

The proposed project is located near Arcata, California, on the Mad River, River Mile 8.4-8.8 (APN 504-161-10), NE ¼ of Section 15, Township 6 North, and Range 1 East, HB&M. Gravel extraction activities consist of bar skimming and trenching by using a front-end loader or scraper. Dump trucks will remove gravel from the extraction site. The proposed project involves the annual extraction of up to 40,000 cubic yards of aggregate from up to four acres along the Mad River. The actual volume removed and the specific area of extraction within each gravel bar varies from year-to-year. Until October 1, up to 200 cubic yards of extracted material may be temporarily stored on the gravel bars prior to loading. After October 1, any gravel stockpiled on river bars will be removed on a daily basis and gravel bars will be graded at the end of each workday. Temporary bridges must conform to the specifications determined by the County of Humboldt Extraction Review Team (CHERT), and must not be placed before June 15 and must be removed by September 15. The extraction season is typically from June 1 to October 31. Gravel extraction activities cease completely after October 15, unless an extension is granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) until October 31.

The Mercer-Fraser Company will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to minimize direct impacts to the channel. The BMPs include the use of existing roads and processing sites. All excavation machinery will be kept out of the low-flow and/or wetted channel at all times. When extraction sites are designated near an active channel, a one-foot minimum vertical offset from the surveyed low-flow channel water surface or a minimum horizontal offset must be incorporated, depending on site-specific locations. The offsets maintain the integrity of the channel and prevent extraction materials from entering the main or secondary channels. General guidelines for minimizing the impacts of the project are included in a Letter of Permission (LOP) issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

On May 31, 1994, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors certified a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for gravel removal from the Lower Mad River (SCH #1992083049); that document evaluates the cumulative impacts of gravel extraction and of channel degradation, “whatever the cause, on the natural resources, public utilities, and structures” in and along the Lower Mad River. That document considers gravel extraction activities at ten specific sites along the Lower Mad River, including Mercer Fraser’s Essex bar operations. Regional Water Board permitting associated with this project will be conditioned, in part, upon compliance with the mitigation measures specified by the County in the PEIR. In addition to conditions set forth by the Regional Water Board, the project is also subject to regulatory review and project approval by the County of Humboldt, the California Department of Fish and Game, Army Corps of Engineers, and NOAA Fisheries.

Regional Water Board staff are 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 under the *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) adopted by the Regional Water Board on June 21, 2005. Staff will consider all comments received during a 30-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter, as well as all comments previously submitted regarding this project application. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Regional Water Board staff Diana Henriouille by phone at (707) 576-2350, or email [dhenriouille-henry@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:dhenriouille-henry@waterboards.ca.gov).