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DIVISION OF RECLAMATION
MINING AND SAFETY

March 31, 2016

Ms. Amy Eschberger
Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety
1313 Sherman Street, Room 215
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: Transit Mix Concrete Company application for Reclamation Permit, Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry
(# M2016010)

Dear Ms. Eschberger

I am submitting this letter on behalf of the 13 property owners within the Ridgewood Estates (Glenrock Drive). Ridgewood Estates is located along Highway 115, two miles North of the proposed Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry operation.

Based on our investigations and research, the owners and residents within the Ridgewood Estates are unanimously opposed to bringing an additional large-scale aggregate mining operation to our community, as there are already three quarries in service along this five mile stretch of Highway 115.

Our research has unveiled significant constraints to additional quarry development in the proposed location including: limited water supplies, a fragile groundwater system, rich wildlife and vegetation resources, public health and safety, air and noise contamination, compromised transportation within the community, traffic hazards along Highway 115, existing quarries that satisfy the demand, violation of current development plans for the area, proximity to local residents, and limited or no alternatives for residents.

Water Supply: All residents in Ridgewood Estates and surrounding neighbors along the Highway 115 corridor depend on ground water for their domestic water supply. These wells likely depend on the fracture system within the granitic rock for water supply, while wells in the adjacent upturned sedimentary rocks may depend upon both these fracture systems and infiltration along the granite-sedimentary rock boundary for recharge. This situation makes such wells dependent on the quality of the recharging surface water and highly susceptible to contamination. **The Heavy rains of 2014 proved this when many of our wells water changed color to tea like, due to the increased runoff that shocked the aquifer. Despite the fact that many of these wells receive water from over 200 feet below the surface, the color change remained for several months.** Contamination from mining operations can travel very quickly through the fracture system to affect domestic wells. The very geology and topography of the proposed Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry site makes such effects exceedingly difficult to predict. Further, the effect from blasting operations (which Transit Mix proposes to conduct two or three times each week) on the fracture system will likely exacerbate the problem, and is equally difficult to predict. **In 1996 when we experienced an aftershock of an earth quake, several wells in our community had a drastic reduction in water production or had to be abandoned.**

Wildlife: An independent and objective wildlife study needs to be completed, rather than accept questionable statements by the applicant. The proposed quarry site is adjacent to and contiguous with the Aiken Canyon Preserve (managed by the Nature Conservancy of Colorado), and included as part of the Aiken Canyon Potential Conservation Area. This area is identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program as a B2 site – Very High significance. It should be noted that the Nature Conservancy shares our opposition to the quarry permit. The quarry site is an area rich in wildlife. It lies between large concentrations of wildlife in the federal lands to the west and Fort Carson to the east, and serves as a major migration route between the two ecotypes. It is inhabited by a great diversity and in some cases high density of wildlife. Most notably, the site is mapped by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as Critical Potential Conservation Habitat for the Mexican Spotted Owl, a federally listed threatened species. **The Mexican Spotted Owl has been documented in the immediate area. The applicant's statement that "turkeys are not common in the mining area" is ludicrous. Anyone who frequents this area knows it harbors one of the largest concentrations of turkeys in this part of Colorado. Sighting of turkeys is an almost daily occurrence here. Turkeys, in particular, are intolerant of industrial operations such as mining. Colorado Parks and Wildlife identifies the proposed quarry site as a primary elk residence and migration area.** More than 100 species of birds have been documented using the area, and the stream corridors are known to be important movement areas for wide-ranging animals such as mountain lions, black bear, mule deer, and elk. There are unconfirmed reports of the presence of Canada Lynx, an endangered species recently reintroduced into Colorado, in the area. The proposed mining plan does not appear to provide an adequate buffer to protect the use of intermittent stream corridors by these sensitive species.

Vegetation: The vegetation analysis sections of the application contain several inaccuracies. The quarry site provides high quality foothills plant communities that are rapidly being converted to development north and south of this area. The dry (xeric) tallgrass sites along the Front Range are also rarely found in the high quality condition in evidence at this site. It contains excellent to good examples of globally-imperiled mountain mahogany/needlegrass community, an excellent occurrence of globally vulnerable piñon pine/Scribner needlegrass community, as well as an excellent occurrence of mesic oak thicket community. The lodgepole pine and blue spruce mentioned repeatedly in the application do not appear in significant numbers, while the white pine, which is very common at the site, is not mentioned at all.

Noise and Air Contamination: Quarrying requires drilling and blasting with explosives, which create vibrations, noise, and dust. Once this process is completed, rock crushing machines crush the rock, conveyor belt machines move the rock around the processing plant; trucks are loaded and unloaded. The process and heavy machinery required to mine, is intrusive and creates significant noise and air pollution; thus having a direct impact on the surrounding areas and community. Air quality is compromised and diminished by the fugitive dust associated with aggregate mining. Dust generated by mining often contains silica, a common naturally occurring crystal found in most rock beds. Prolonged exposure to silica may result in silicosis. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "silicosis is a disabling, nonreversible and sometimes fatal lung disease caused by over exposure to respirable crystalline silica. Over exposure to dust that contains microscopic particles of crystalline silica can cause scar tissue to form in the lungs, which reduces the lung's ability to extract oxygen from the air we breathe." In addition to silicosis, inhalation of crystalline silica particles has been associated with other diseases, such as bronchitis and tuberculosis.

Noise and Air Contamination continued: Due to our unique dry climate with sustained Chinook winds of 20 to 40 miles per hour this is a health issue for both humans and animals living within a four mile radius of this quarry. Dr. Robert Nathan, MD, a Diplomate of the American Board of Allergy and Immunology, and known world wide for his research and knowledge, noted in a letter to your office that the Silica dust behaves similarly to pollen, "it can impact the airways of asthma and COPD patients as far as 3-4 miles away." We have several of those patients living here daily on Glenrock Drive.

Transportation: Transportation in the Highway 115 area is unique in that the normal hierarchy of roads do not exist. Highway 115 is the lifeline upon which residents depend. It is the only means of transportation into, out of, and within the community. **There are no other alternatives, and residents cannot avoid using Highway 115 for their life-sustaining transportation needs.** Thus, the condition and safety of Highway 115 are primary concerns of all residents. According to the El Paso County Major Transportation Corridors Plan (MTCP), Highway 115 south of Fort Carson's main gate is functionally classified as "congested". Major sections of the highway are two lane, including the point at which Transit Mix proposes to access the highway. The proposed highway access point is also located at a historically dangerous place, with multiple fatal traffic accidents in recent years. **Unfortunately, the 2040 MTCP Roadway Plan does not call for any improvements to Highway 115 through the year 2040, so the highway we have now is what we will live with for many years to come. If the Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry is allowed to proceed, an already congested highway, currently bearing truck traffic from three active quarries, will be burdened by as many as 624 additional trucks per day when the quarry is at full production. This additional traffic will exacerbate traffic hazards not only for the local residents, but also for the many commuters who use this major thoroughfare to Colorado Springs, as well as the many tourists, bicyclists, and motorcycle clubs who frequent the area for its unique geographic and aesthetic appeal.**

Existing Quarries: There are currently three quarries operating within a five mile stretch along Highway 115, the nearest less than three miles from the proposed Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry site. The quarry operators report they are currently operating at roughly half their capacity. When questioned why such low production, the response is "insufficient demand". This calls into question the need for yet another quarry on the backs of the already burdened local residents.

Proximity to Local Residents: There are more than 140 properties within two miles of the proposed quarry site, some as close as 1200 feet and with direct line-of-sight to the quarry operations. The vast majority, if not all, of these property owners are vehemently opposed to the applicant's quarry plans. The policies incorporated in the El Paso County Southwestern Highway 115 Comprehensive Plan (see below) state "any resource extraction operation should be located a minimum of two miles distant from any dissenting residents".

Comprehensive Development Plan: This application for permit is in clear violation of the current Southwestern (Highway 115) Comprehensive Plan. This is a plan commissioned and adopted by the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners for the Highway 115 area. This comprehensive plan foresaw the potential for future demands for mineral resource extraction in the area, and adopted specific policies to address it. The Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry application is in specific violation of the following policies in this plan:

1. The entire burden of proof for demonstrating the existence of extractable mineral resources should lie with the applicant. Designation of potentially extractable mineral resources in the Master Plan for the Extraction of Commercial Mineral Deposits should in no way be seen as a justification or an implied right for mining.
2. Resource extraction operations in general are not supported in the planning area. However, the presence of existing operations is recognized, and if future conditions dictate the necessity for additional supplies of aggregate, the expansion of existing operations is preferred over new quarries.
3. At no time during their operations should resource extraction affect the quantity, quality, or dependability of residents' existing water supplies or result in the diversion of existing water supplies. The full burden of proof for assuring this will lie with the applicant.
4. Access from Highway 115 to any resource extraction operation should not affect the quality of the existing access to area residents.
5. Unless it can be demonstrated that topography will shield existing residents from visual, noise, and dust impacts, all resource extraction operations should be located a minimum of two miles distant from any dissenting residents.
6. Wildlife and wildlife protection routes should be protected through the development of a wildlife overlay zone, addressing the need for protecting critical habitat areas.
7. Development should not be allowed in riparian areas, both because the hazard of flooding and because of their exceptionally high wildlife values. Any drainage improvements undertaken in the area should be treated in the most natural way possible to minimize any impacts on riparian areas.
8. The specific area of Aiken Canyon is identified as a unique and significant biological resource of state-wide significance that should continue to be preserved. Preservation is not compatible with most public access, and management should maximize wildlife and scientific values.

No Alternatives: Residents in close proximity to the proposed quarry have no other alternatives but their status quo. They have but one source of water, their individual wells. They have but one route of ingress and egress to their properties, Little Turkey Creek Road. They have but one transportation corridor into and out of the community, Highway 115. Even routine operations of a Hitch Rack Ranch Quarry will have a significant impact on residents. For example, blasting operations, which Transit Mix proposes to conduct two or three times each week, will require closing Little Turkey Creek Road, precluding the owners and residents of 43 lots from leaving or returning to their properties. More severe occurrences run the risk of closing the only highway and/or effectively sealing off access to properties in the area.

The objections addressed above should be considered representative, but incomplete due to the limited time frame available to us for review, research and analysis. We reiterate our request that the study period be extended to give us a reasonable amount of time to conduct a thorough and meaningful study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully, 

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Colorado Springs, CO 80926
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Copy to:

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1125 Kelly Johnson Blvd., #330, Colorado Springs, CO 80920

Senator Kevin Grantham, Colorado State Senator, District 2
200 E. Colfax Ave., Denver, CO 80203

Representative Lois Landgraf, Colorado State Representative, District 21
200 E. Colfax Ave., Denver, CO 80203

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