



**For Immediate Release:  
September 8, 2010**

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Russian Riverkeeper Files Lawsuit Against Granite Open Pit Gravel Mine in Ukiah

**Healdsburg, CA:** After exhausting all other remedies, Russian Riverkeeper filed a lawsuit on August 30<sup>th</sup> against Mendocino County's approval of the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Use Permit for the Granite Construction Kunzler Ranch open pit gravel mine along the Russian River in Ukiah.

Riverkeeper was prompted to file the lawsuit since the EIR has not fully identified or analyzed potentially severe adverse environmental impacts and therefore can not possibly ensure project impacts to the River are offset by mitigations as required by law.

Since 1993, Russian Riverkeeper, formerly Friends of the Russian River, has opposed deep riverside strip mining pits due to permanent and devastating impacts that have been well documented in Sonoma County's middle reach near Healdsburg. Open pit gravel mining transforms fertile farmland into a forever barren landscape pockmarked with deep stagnant pits that spew sediment into our already sediment-polluted Russian River in flood events.

Riverkeeper is concerned that the Ukiah Valley is now on the path to a future with more deep gravel pits, like Sonoma County's Middle Reach, that will permanently destroy prime farmlands and create permanent impacts to the Russian River's health and water quality and its native Steelhead that have been prized by generations of anglers.

The recently approved Granite Kunzler open pit mine would violate National Marine Fisheries Services gravel extraction guidelines by digging well below the depth of the Russian River and by mining in the active floodplain. Additional issues raised in the lawsuit were the rejection of feasible alternate mine sites, the failure to disclose adverse impacts to the Russian River and its wildlife and the failure to be follow the Mendocino County General Plan.

"It is a slippery slope how one pit mine approval led to the next in Sonoma County and Granite owns over a dozen riverside parcels in Ukiah that could become future pit mines", according to Don McEnhill, Riverkeeper director. "In all the EIRs we have reviewed this is one of the most deficient in complying with the law and we are simply asking that the project EIR follow the law. It is unfortunate the County and Supervisors ignored the issues we raised that could have been addressed without a lawsuit."

The Russian River is our principal drinking water source and it has been documented how Sonoma County gravel mining has reduced aquifer storage of water. The Ukiah Valley just endured a summer of strict water rationing last year so digging up sand and gravel that can store water forever to get a few years of gravel is not in the Ukiah Valley's best interests. Native Russian River steelhead trout will become trapped in the gravel pits after floods and most existing pits are filled with non-native fish that prey upon steelhead. "The community and future generations expect the County to protect the Russian River and environment as required by our laws and the County's own General Plan but this project threatens those resources rather than protects them," explained Mr. McEnhill.

According to Russian Riverkeeper's attorney, Stephan Volker, Granite Construction's proposed "open pit gravel mine repeats the mistakes of the past. Rather than locate the mine outside the flood plain to protect the Russian River, its water quality, dependent fish and wildlife, and public recreation, this 65-foot deep pit would be excavated in the worst possible location where it will pose a grave threat to all of these irreplaceable resources." "Accordingly, we are asking the superior court to send this project back to the drawing board after completion of adequate environmental studies and examination of better alternative sites," added Mr. Volker.

Russian Riverkeeper is a Healdsburg based non-profit organization with over 1400 members and funded by local contributions from the community. Russian Riverkeeper works with the community to educate, advocate and uphold our environmental laws for the protection and restoration of the Russian River and its wildlife, and to benefit all who enjoy it.

The Law Offices of Stephan C. Volker are representing Russian Riverkeeper in this matter and lead attorney Stephan Volker can be reached in his Oakland office at the number listed above.