

Date: December 19, 2017
To: Amy Eschberger
From: Aiken Audubon Society
Re: Objection Letter to proposed quarry at Hitch Rack Ranch - #M2017-049

Greetings:

The Aiken Audubon Society (AAS), a regional birding and wildlife association based in Colorado Springs, believes that the placement of a 200-acre quarry on the Hitch Rack Ranch property in El Paso County would seriously compromise wildlife habitat in the area. **Our organization, which is comprised of over 700 members throughout the Pikes Peak region, opposes the development of a quarry in this location.**

The proposed quarry's location lies due north of, and adjacent to, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Aiken Canyon Preserve and lease properties. Aiken Canyon has long been a prime birding destination, and hosts over 100 species of birds. It is part of a nearly contiguous migration corridor including BLM's Beaver Creek Wilderness Study Area, Aiken Canyon and Little Turkey Creek, and Fort Carson.

Most of the proposed quarry site and access road are contained within the **Aiken Canyon Potential Conservation Area**, which is considered to be "of Very High Significance" by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP). El Paso County, in its 2013 Open Space Master Plan, specifically gave the proposed quarry area and Little Turkey Creek drainage **very high open space values**. According to TNC, "the quarry site is entirely in **Critical Habitat for the Mexican Spotted Owl**, a federally-listed threatened species." It also is home to a rapidly-declining Pinon-Juniper community.

The Aiken Audubon Society is extremely concerned that nearby quarrying activities will adversely affect the conservation values, and in particular the avifauna and wildlife, of TNC's properties. Quarry operations, creating traffic, dust, noise and loss of vegetation, would disrupt the migration corridor and displace elk, black bears, mountain lions, bobcats and mule deer, as well as numerous raptors and other birds that depend on this particular habitat. Adding a new road will further fragment wildlife corridors.

Mining runoff-into Little Turkey Creek could create serious issues for wildlife as riparian areas continue to decline in the west. According to Robert H. Wayland III of the EPA, "riparian areas comprise less than one percent of the land area of most western States, yet up to **80 percent of all wildlife species in this region of the country are dependent upon riparian areas** for at least part of their life cycles".

In conclusion, this large swath of land, including the quarry property, Aiken Canyon, the Beaver Creek WSA and Fort Carson, represents a crucial link between the mountains and the prairies, as well as providing a north-south course along the Front Range. We fear that the implementation of a mining facility would damage the conservation values of this vital and unique landscape, and **we emphatically urge you to decline Transit Mix Concrete's application (#2017-049).**

Sincerely,

Linda Hodges
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Rise Foster-Bruder
President, Aiken Audubon Society