



Dear Mr. Kevin Poe

I am writing to share the concerns of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County (ACCGov) Department of Public Utilities and the Office of Sustainability related to the rock quarry proposed by Vulcan Industries in the South Jackson County area off US441, near the Athens-Clarke County line. According to the information that has been provided to ACCGov officials, the proposed activities include a quarry and an asphalt plant. Even though no specific information has been made available with respect to the projected depth, volume, and material type to be removed by the quarry activity, there are some general concerns as to how Vulcan's proposed project may affect Athens-Clarke County.

Quarry activities require a significant level of water handling, including quarry pit "dewatering," aggregate washing, and dust suppression. Potential impacts from these operations may include water run-off, a significant decrease in groundwater level, reduction in stream/river flow, and loss of wetlands critical to maintaining water quality. Some specific concerns related to potential quarry operations include:

1. Outflow from the proposed quarry will drain directly into the North Oconee River – one of two sources of drinking water for Athens-Clarke County. Water quality of the North Oconee is already of significant concern; on June 20, 2023, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources identified the North Oconee River as "impaired" and established an Upper Oconee Regional Water Plan to help address growing issues with water quantity and quality. Impacts to the North Oconee River could impact permitting and limitations, already established in permit for Athens-Clarke County.
2. The proposed quarry is located on top of one of the few identified ground water recharge areas in our region. Thus, there are concerns related to the quarry's impact on water recharge rates and potential contamination of ground water. Depending on the soil and rock conditions and type of material being extracted, quarry operations may produce heavy metals or other toxic pollutants. Impacts to the ground water recharge area and associated processes may create additional negative consequences to well-owners in Jackson and Athens-Clarke Counties.
3. The site is located less than seven miles from one of Athens-Clarke County's main freshwater intakes, the J. G. Beacham Water Treatment Plant. Currently, it is significantly less expensive to pump and treat water from the North Oconee River than from either the Middle Oconee or the Bear Creek Reservoir. Thus, any decrease in water volume coupled with additional quality degradation of the North Oconee River could substantially increase water treatment costs by requiring a more intensive treatment process along with greater reliance on these more expensive, alternative raw water sources, including those directly used by the Jackson County Water and Sewerage Authority.
4. Athens-Clarke County Public Utilities Department (PUD) recently purchased a quarry near the Ben Epps Airport to ultimately serve as a reservoir to buffer the area against future drought. It is anticipated that PUD will begin filling this reservoir by 2030, using water from the North Oconee River. Thus, a reduction in volume and/or an increase in contaminants could adversely affect this process and thus, delay and add cost for the community's preparedness for future drought events.
5. Adjacent to the property for the proposed development along the North Oconee River are extensive flood plains and wetlands. These areas act like "kidneys" for water entering the river, mitigating pollutants and enhancing water quality. A drop in water quality from pollutants and/or a decrease in quantity from quarry operations would adversely affect the functioning of these wetlands; this would, in turn, have a significant, negative impact on habitat and wildlife in north Athens-Clarke County.



6. Other concerns include the amount of dust generated from both extraction and on-site transportation via dirt roads and the noise and vibration from quarry operations. With prevailing winds moving from Jackson to Athens-Clarke County, air quality could be adversely affected – including near homes and popular recreation areas such as Sandy Creek Park and Sandy Creek Nature Center. Moreover, Athens-Clarke County has worked hard to maintain compliance with the EPA air quality standards related to particulate matter and ground level ozone. Research indicates that quarry activities may increase particulate matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10) levels in surrounding air quality. Given the limited number of air quality monitors in our region, any air quality violations in Athens-Clarke County may justify the state applying corrective measures for surrounding counties, including Jackson County.
7. The noise and vibrations from the quarry may lower property values, prompt residents to move out of the area, and detract from the quality of enjoyment for nearby residents and patrons using Sandy Creek Park and Sandy Creek Nature Center.
8. The increased number of heavy trucks entering the highway from a single location will likely cause an increase in traffic congestion on the surrounding roadways, especially the Old Jefferson Road/Highway 129 and the 10 loop/US441 interchanges. Community members have already expressed their concern with the current level of traffic congestion in these areas.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that you will consider these concerns with regard to Vulcan Industries' pursuit of this project. Since this project will likely affect Athens-Clarke County in a number of significant ways, I would appreciate ACCGov being included in future discussion of this project – as appropriate, as the application process moves forward.

I look forward to gaining a greater understanding of this project and to further discussions related to the Vulcan application.

Sincerely,

Blaine Williams
Manager
Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County