



September 7, 2023

Dear Chairman Crow and Jackson County Commissioners,

We, the Board of Directors of Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc. (SCNC Inc.), are writing to express our grave concerns about the request from Vulcan Materials to rezone approximately 1,000 acres of agricultural land roughly 4 miles upstream of the Nature Center along the North Oconee River.

Now marking its 50th year anniversary, Sandy Creek Nature Center provides environmental stewardship and passive recreation on a 225-acre site that serves more than 60,000 people a year, including hundreds from Jackson County and its multiple schools. SCNC Inc. is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1973 that partners with Athens-Clarke County to support, promote, and protect the environmental education and preservation efforts of Sandy Creek Nature Center. The Nature Center is bounded by the North Oconee River on the west and Sandy Creek on the east, both of which potentially could be impacted by Vulcan's proposed quarry.

Our research indicates that quarries can have significant negative impacts on human and natural systems. Of particular concern to our Board are:

Water resources: The proposed quarry site is on the North Oconee River watershed. Increased siltation and industrial contaminants from stormwater runoff and the heavy withdrawal of river water for operations would detrimentally impact water quality¹, potentially damaging the Nature Center's wetlands, wildlife, visitor experience and educational programming. Additionally, the North Oconee River is a major source of drinking water for more than 100,000 people in and around Athens-Clarke County. Withdrawing surface waters and groundwater within a groundwater recharge zone will alter aquifer levels, most likely leading to contamination and/or drying of wells throughout the area.

Air quality: Granite quarrying and crushing produces vast amounts of dust, much of it containing silicates. On-site exposure to silicate dust has been shown to cause an incurable lung disease, silicosis². Studies of off-site health impacts are lacking, but there is no question dust that is blown, washed, or tracked off-site is a nuisance and an irritant. This is of particular concern because two community recreation sites, Sandy Creek Park and Sandy Creek Nature Center, are downwind (Georgia's westerly prevailing winds) of the proposed quarry site.

Safety and quality of life: Rock quarries use blasting, cutting, and heavy equipment. Vibration and noise from operations potentially can cause damage to nearby structures, environmental degradation, reduction of property values, worker illnesses, loss of property use, noise pollution, and reduction of quality of life³. Additionally, the opening of this quarry is likely to increase heavy truck traffic traveling to and from Loop 10 along U.S. 441/Ga. 15. Primary access to Sandy Creek Nature Center is from two locations on U.S. 441/Ga. 15, and quarry trucks traveling at high speeds down steep grades could pose safety concerns for families and school buses attempting to enter and exit the Nature Center.

Precedent: We are deeply concerned that this rezoning would set a precedent that expands the industrialization of south Jackson County and the Oconee River/Sandy Creek watersheds. At approximately 1,000 acres, the Vulcan site would dwarf the two existing industrial sites nearby and would extend industrial zoning all the way from U.S. 441 to Chandler Bridge Road, an immense expansion of this otherwise limited land use. Such industrialization would destroy the agricultural/residential character of the area, potentially resulting in permanent degradation of Sandy Creek Nature Center and the streams that flow through it.

Track record: Good Jobs First documented 127 environmental, safety and labor violations by Vulcan Materials since 2000, resulting in more than \$4.2 million in fines and penalties⁴. We are concerned that this history indicates a poor track record of adherence to regulations, and that fines and penalties may not be an effective deterrent.

As a result of the above concerns, we respectfully ask that you abide by Jackson County's existing land use and zoning plans and deny this rezoning request.

Sincerely,



Emily Carr, President
Sandy Creek Nature Center Inc.

References

1. Langer, W. H. & Arbogast, B. F. Environmental impacts of mining natural aggregate. *Deposit and geoenvironmental models for resource exploitation and environmental security* 151-169 (2002).
2. Hua, J. T., Rose, C. S. & Redlich, C. A. Engineered Stone-Associated Silicosis—A Lethal Variant of an Ancient Disease. *JAMA Internal Medicine* (2023) doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2023.3260.
3. Sevelka, T. Blasting Quarry Operations: Land Use Compatibility Issues and Potential Property Value Impacts. *JELP* 02, 1-78 (2022).
4. Violation Tracker Current Parent Company Summary. *Good Jobs First Violation Tracker* <https://violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/parent/vulcan-materials>.