

San Antonio Express-News

By [Liz Teitz](#), Staff writer

Dec 26, 2023

Opponents gear up for new fight against proposed Comal County quarry, this time over water

The company is planning a quarry on a 1,500-acre property between New Braunfels and Bulverde.

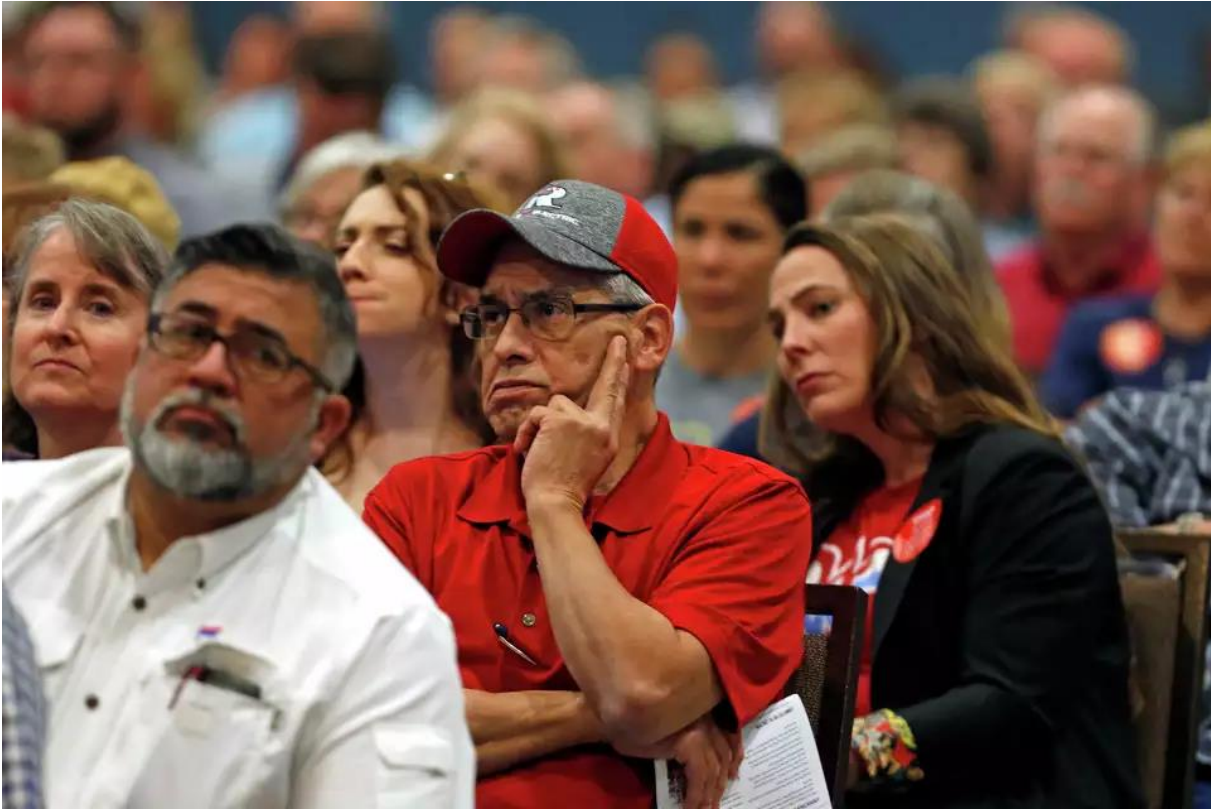


Part of the rock crushing operations at Vulcan Materials' quarry near O'Connor Road and Loop 1604 is seen Nov. 29, 2017. The company has been working since 2017 to open a new quarry facility in Comal County, between New Braunfels and Bulverde, but environmentalists and advocates have been fighting to block the company's permits for the last six years.

William Luther/San Antonio Express-News

Opponents of a proposed quarry in Comal County are forming a new plan to fight the project after losing their latest effort to block the facility's air quality permit.

Since 2017, the Preserve Our Hill Country Environment Foundation and other advocates have been battling Vulcan Materials Company's plan to operate a new quarry between New Braunfels and Bulverde.



Audience listens to presentation at TCEQ Public Meeting on proposed Vulcan Materials quarry in Comal County on Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at New Braunfels Civic Center ↑

Ed Harris makes a point during the TCEQ Public Meeting on proposed Vulcan Materials quarry in Comal County on Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at New Braunfels Civic Center ↓



Photos by: Ronald Cortes

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After the Texas Supreme Court [turned down](#) their attempt to overturn the quarry's air quality permit this fall, they're now turning their attention to what they say will be its detrimental effects on water, including the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, Dry Comal Creek and the Comal River.

Under the permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Vulcan can operate a quarry on the site that will emit up to 95,000 pounds of pollutants per year from rock-crushing operations and equipment. The Alabama-based company has said it will operate "in a safe, socially and environmentally responsible manner," and will "protect and conserve water resources."

According to Vulcan's website, it has 66 facilities and offices in Texas; in November, it sold its ready-mix concrete facilities in the state to Tennessee-based [SRM Concrete](#), but it still has dozens of locations in Texas, including six in the San Antonio area.

The company [calls the location](#), near Texas 46 and FM 3009, "strategically positioned" where it can "responsibly support the local economy and meet the growing community needs, including infrastructure and transportation safety improvements."

Opponents say the quarry would affect 12,000 people within a 5-mile radius. They have argued the actual emission rates will be higher from blasting and trucking, and that it will create not just visible dust and haze but invisible particulate matter that can be inhaled into people's lungs and enter their bloodstream.

They've also raised concerns about damage from seismic activity caused by blasting at the site and about damage to the area's water supply and water quality. The quarry would stretch across almost three miles of the recharge zone, an environmentally sensitive area where water enters the Edwards Aquifer, the underground cavern system that provides water for more than 2 million people.

Advocacy groups Stop 3009 Vulcan Quarry and Friends of Dry Comal Creek, both of which are part of Preserve Our Hill Country Environment, started fighting the quarry through TCEQ's administrative processes in 2017. After the agency issued the permit in 2019, they filed suit, and in 2021, a Travis County district court judge ruled in their favor, [overturning the permit](#).



Terri Hall addresses the Vulcan representatives at the TCEQ Public Meeting on proposed Vulcan Materials quarry in Comal County on Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at New Braunfels Civic Center as other line up behind her waiting their turn to make comments. Terri Hall is founder/Director of TURF(Texans uniting for Reform and Freedom) Photo by: Ronald Cortes

But Vulcan appealed that decision and the Texas Third Court of Appeals [reversed the lower court's decision](#) in 2022, determining that TCEQ had not erred in awarding the permit. The opponents challenged that at the Texas Supreme Court, which said in a Sept. 29 filing that it had denied the petition.

After weighing other options, PHCE has decided it has exhausted that avenue to block the quarry and is pursuing a different approach, the organization's president Milann Guckian said in a news release.

The organization's board and attorneys "concluded that we have run the gamut on fighting the air quality permit," she said. "Our capital would be better used to identify and fight a myriad of other issues including, but not limited to water, sensitive features (caves), and endangered species."

The group expects Vulcan to submit a Water Pollution Abatement Plan application to the TCEQ as part of the agency's Edwards Aquifer Protection Plan requirements. If the TCEQ determines the application is administratively complete, it will begin the public notification and comment process, during which the opponents will have an opportunity to challenge the quarry again.

"The process repeats itself," Guckian said. "We are now in a fight for water."

The groups' concerns include how the proposed quarry might affect West Fork Dry Comal Creek, which converges with Dry Comal Creek and ultimately the Comal River, home to several endangered species and a key part of New Braunfels' recreation economy and economic development.

The location over the recharge zone is also a concern, she said, because water from the surface enters the Edwards Aquifer through caves and sinkholes, called karst features, so any effects to the water quality on the surface would threaten the groundwater system.

"The aquifer provides drinking water to over 2 million people and must therefore be protected," Guckian said. Pollution in any of Comal County's waterways and water systems, including the Edwards and Trinity aquifers and the Comal and Guadalupe rivers, would put other water sources in danger, she said.

"A quarry (Vulcan) sitting in the middle of all these water resources would present numerous challenges to these many interlinked systems, leaving our community exposed to water quality and quantity sustainability issues," she said.

On a [website with information about the project](#), Vulcan said there will be at least 600 acres of buffers, setbacks and "non-mining areas" on the 1,500-acre property. The company said it will not draw any water from the Edwards Aquifer and will extract rock only from the upper surface "above the aquifer water table." The quarry will draw "minimal water" from the Trinity Aquifer, "far less than the amount of water used by most residential subdivisions," and will recycle an average of 85% of that water, Vulcan said.

The [Trinity Aquifer](#), like the Edwards, is a groundwater system that provides water for Central Texas and runs throughout much of the Hill Country. According to the Texas Water Development Board, it's one of the "most extensive and highly used groundwater resources in Texas."

In the first year of operation, the company will conduct blasting to extract rock from the ground about 1-2 times per month. During years five through 10, it will blast approximately one to two times per week, the website states. In the first 10 years, Vulcan will mine about 50 acres.

The total life of the quarry is expected to be up to 80 years, "depending on market conditions."