**Douglas Mtn. Ranch's state permit application withdrawn**

By Corinne Westeman

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Developers for Douglas Mountain Ranch have informed state officials that they're withdrawing their application for a state mining permit.

Last year, Douglas Mountain Ranch project stakeholders submitted a revised application to the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety with the intention of completing the state process first and then amending its zoning application with Clear Creek County.

However, Ben Langenfeld, a professional engineer with Greg Lewicki & Associates, who was working with the applicant, confirmed that the applicant contacted officials to withdraw the state permit. He wasn't aware of any future plans regarding the property.

The proposed quarry was planning to remove 10 million to 15 million tons of rocks and gravel from a plateau area south of Empire during the course of 20 years and then have a reservoir on site to store water.

In an Oct. 24 letter to state officials, applicant Empire Aggregates, Inc. stated: "While Empire Aggregates still believes that it could craft a mining and reclamation plan that would be satisfactory to both the public and to all regulators, objections posed by certain parties have effectively blocked this path. ... The scale and scope of engineering and design work needed to address all concerns is not worth pursuing in the face of these objections."

Empire Aggregates also noted that Colorado Parks & Wildlife won't work with it on a path forward. The division responded in an Oct. 25 letter that it had accepted the applicant's request to withdraw.

As of Thursday, Clear Creek County planner Adam Springer confirmed that he had yet to hear from the applicant about withdrawing the property's rezoning and boundary line adjustment cases.

In the fall of 2018, both cases were in the public notice stage of the process, but one of properties included in the application was bought by another entity and could no longer be involved. Thus, Springer explained, the applicant needed to submit an amended application for the cases to continue.

However, he was told that the applicant wished to pursue the state permit first before going through the county's processes. Thus, both cases have been on hold for several months, he said.

Empire's Margi Kaspari, of the Friends of Clear Creek group, said that she and her colleagues are thrilled that the property south of town will no longer be a gravel pit. The group initially organized about a year-and-a-half ago because residents were concerned about the development's impact on the environment, infrastructure and overall quality of life.

Kaspari added that the group is working with some nonprofit groups to acquire the property for open space.

"We're pretty fired up," she said. "... It's encouraging that a grassroots organization and a small town can fight big business."

*Contact reporter Corinne Westeman at 303-567-4491 or* *cwesteman@evergreenco.com**, and follow her on Twitter @cwesteman.*