

Denver Post Creates Fake News Story on Gravel Pit Controversy

Fake news can be defined as “reporting that is biased, misleading and misrepresenting the truth.” Denver Post reporter Bruce Finley did a fine job of this in his April 25, 2017, article regarding the Pueblo County gravel pit controversy. The article was heavily one sided, inaccurate and omitted information that would have provided resounding justification as to why the Pueblo County Planning Commission recommended approval of the permit application. Unfortunately, this type of fake news reporting is all too common as it relates to land use and construction materials operations.

The article painted a picture that the gravel pit permit would allow some big corporation to disrupt a historic farming district by setting up a 1 million tons/year “industrial digging” operation and drive local farmers and ranchers out of business while ruining wildlife habitat. The article left the reader questioning why the application would be approved this time when it was denied twice before.

First the misleading. The article failed to point out that the applicant is creating a 1,200-acre buffer to the 300 acres that will be mined. Once the mining is complete the land will be reclaimed with top soil added and restored to land that can be ranched. The applicant has presented reports and data that refutes the claims of impacts of noise, dust, sediment runoff, etc. There are many local farmers that have gone on record in support of the project yet the focus of the article was on the viewpoint of the owner of a 10-acre hobby farm and one of only 2 or 3 farmers against the project.

Next, the untruthful. The proposed site is not a pristine farming site filled with wildlife but a rocky mesa filled with cactus and unfit for farming and ranching. The permit restrictions of 70 loads/day, 5 days/week, would restrict the yearly output to a fraction of the reported 1 million tons/year. The permit applicant, Fremont Paving & Redi Mix, LLC. is a third-generation family business based in Fremont County with 43 employees who currently reside in Pueblo County.

Finally, the omissions. 36 Lane is the primary road in and out of the proposed gravel pit. It is designated for commercial (truck) traffic and currently serves an active gravel pit one mile away that is nearly mined out. The gravel operation will result in \$7 million provided to schools throughout the state and additional road and safety improvements, none of which would be completed if the permit was denied. The Planning Commission recommended approval because the applicant made significant concessions and revisions to reduce impact.

According to John Paul Ary, Owner/Operator, Fremont Paving & Redi Mix, LLC., “The application is totally different to the ones submitted in 2001 and 2012. We have the support of the County because we sat down with local land owners at their kitchen tables and have agreed to nearly every condition that was requested. We agreed to reduce the number of truck trips per day, to eliminate any onsite material processing, and to leave the view of the skyline intact. Our operation is restricted to one machine with no processing and no crushing. This is the same as what you see when the Bessemer Ditch is cleaned.” None of this information was included in the article by the Denver Post.

Post writer Mr. Finley creatively used quotes from the opposition to avoid accountability; well-placed adjectives such as “historic” and “industrial” to enflame the argument; and drove the opposition argument home with a solid four paragraph concluding statement complete with the suggestion that the poor old farmers lose

every time. The photo attached to the article wasn't of the barren land where the proposed pit is going, or a rendering of a before and after, but of the hobby farmer in his radish patch.

Fake news – biased, misleading, and misrepresenting the truth. The Denver Post should be ashamed for printing it and giving the pretense of being fair, objective, and balanced. The real story was what led the Planning Commission to a near unanimous vote of approval. Gravel operations co-existing in Colorado's communities are as much a part of our heritage as farming and ranching. Without affordable construction materials, Colorado's future and the American dream for that matter, go out the window. I'd suggest that reporters such as Mr. Finley revise their bios to include a full disclosure statement of being environmental activists and that red flags of fake news alerts go up for Denver Post readers on articles involving land use and construction materials.

To view the Denver Post article: <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/04/25/gravel-pit-project-arkansas-river-pueblo-county/>



Thomas Peterson, P.E.; Executive Director; Colorado Asphalt Pavement Association



Denver Post – Fake News Photo



Proposed Gravel Pit – Actual Location Photo