SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

IN RE: MINE OPERATING PERMIT	TRANSCRIPT
HIERS PINE LEVEL, LLC, JASPER COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA	OF PUBLIC HEARING

Date: October 1, 2026

Time: 7:03 p.m.

Location: Lakeside at Blue Heron, 153 James L. Taylor Drive, Ridgeland, South Carolina

Reported by
Julie Taradash

APPEARANCES

SCDES Officials Present:
Catherine Sawyer, Hearing Officer
Jeremy Eddy,
Project Manager, Mining and Reclamation Section

Speakers from the Public:
Grant McClure
Donna McIver
Nanci Polk-Weckhorst
Trina Cournoyer
John Holloway
Glenn Rivers

INDEX

Introductions by Ms. Sawyer: 3
Statement by Mr. Eddy: 5
Public Comments: 5
Closing: 23

PROCEEDINGS

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Good evening. The time is now 7:03 p.m. on Thursday, October 1st, 2026, and this public hearing will now begin.

This hearing is being held by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services to receive comments on the application submitted by Hiers Pine Level, LLC, for a permit to mine sand and clay at a site located on Pine Level Church Road in Jasper County, approximately 2.2 miles northwest of Grays, South Carolina.

As a formal proceeding, the purpose of this hearing is to report oral comments for the official record. SCDES staff will not respond to questions or comments during the hearing. My name is Catherine Sawyer, and I will serve as your hearing officer.

Before we begin, a few reminders: Please silence cell phones and electronic devices. If you have not done so already, please sign up out front at the table so we have a record of who attended tonight, and we can notify you of future updates.

SCDES's permitting process requires applicants to demonstrate that their proposed operations can meet all state and federal environmental

regulations. Our role is to review applications, and, if appropriate, issue and enforce permits that protect human health and the environment. Your role is to provide comments for consideration. While decisions are not based on a vote or the number of similar comments, your input may influence whether or not a permit is issued or, if issued, the terms and conditions written into it.

We will now outline tonight's process. First, Jeremy Eddy will read a brief statement about the proposed mine. After that, I will call on those who indicated on the sign-in sheet they wish to speak. If you choose not to comment when called, you may decline. After all listed speakers have commented, I will ask if anyone else wishes to speak. Once all comments are received, I will give closing remarks and adjourn the hearing.

To ensure fairness and efficiency, please follow these guidelines: Your comments should not go over five minutes. If you're not able to get your comment on the record in that amount of time, there are other ways to comment; we can repost it again. Also, please be respectful towards anyone speaking here tonight, and do not interrupt or ask other participants to respond to your comments.

Should any comments or actions begin to move away from the intent of the hearing, I may ask the speaker to limit their statements and be seated. As a reminder, we will not be answering questions during this hearing.

Jeremy, would you please read your statement?

MR. EDDY: On April 3rd, 2026, Hiers Pine Level, LLC, submitted an application for a mine operating permit in Jasper County. The application requests to permit 86.1 acres; 60.7 acres is proposed to be affected by mining, while 25.4 acres will remain undisturbed as buffer. The reclamation plan purposes to reclaim the site to a pond with grass banks.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: That's all right. We will now hear from those of you who indicated on the sign-in sheet that you wish to speak. If you're unable to complete your comments within the five-minute allotted time, you may still submit them in writing through the end of the public comment period on October 16th, 2026. When I call on you, please come down front to the microphone and clearly state and spell your name for the court reporter.

Grant McClure.

MR. MCCLURE: If I turn this --

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: You can turn around and speak with them, or you can speak to us, either way.

MR. MCCLURE: Sorry. Hello, my name is Grant McClure. I am the South Coast Office Director with the Coastal Conservation League, which is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit environmental advocacy organization. And we are currently involved in the zoning appeal. I'm representing several landowners in the area who are concerned about impacts to the environment and their -- their quality of life from the sand mine that will be operating for up to 20 years, no doubt producing quite a bit of truck traffic, you know. I understand that's outside the purview of this agency; however, it is a concern.

And additionally, I think we're concerned about potential impacts to wildlife. It was mentioned that, you know, wildlife is often seen on these sites. However, I did notice in the -- in the reports that Northern Long-Eared Bat and Tri-Colored Bat are potentially in the area, and those are federally protected species. And so concerns about impacts to those. And I believe it was recommended that timbering be avoided during certain months of the year. So we want to ensure that that is actually taking place.

And, additionally, I noticed in the -- the documents that there's a cemetery, and I think it's called Phillips Burke Cemetery. And so just concerns about how they're going to mitigate the impacts to that cemetery, you know. I think those are kind of sacred spaces, and you can imagine that, you know, mining could be destructive. And so, you know, how will those folks visiting their loved ones be impacted by this mine?

And I also just wanted to mention that it does feel a little bit like Groundhog Day because there's been three of these hearings on sand mines in Jasper County recently. You know, of course, the two Glover Mines, now the Heritage Mine. I saw recently the Deerfield Mine is looking to expand, and they will actually be impacting wetlands directly. Additionally, we had the Monroe Tract Mine down in Levy last spring. And additionally, I believe there was another one close along Frontage Road, recently.

And so, you know, how many more mines are we going to allow in Jasper County? At what point does the county become, you know, a giant crater, you know? It's -- it's concerning, the -- the rate at which these are popping up. You know, I've been

at the Conservation League for about five years now and cannot recall this frequency of mining taking place. And so it is a concern.

You know, while there may not be impacts to wetlands directly on-site, we know that a lot of this fill material does impact wetlands off-site, right? And so we're seeing so much residential development in places like Hardeeville and very low-lying areas where it doesn't make sense to build, and that's where I think a lot of this sand is going, which it's -- it's concerning.

And, additionally, you know, we hear that, "Oh, we need this. We need this sand to build. We need it for progress. "t's -- it's -- it's so critical that we have this sand." And, yes, we probably do need sand, but do we need all of it? Has there been any kind of analysis to determine how much the market really needs?

The other thing that's frustrating is that these mines seem to expand forever in perpetuity, and they're almost kind of piecemealed along.

And lastly, I just want to say, you know, is it perhaps putting the cart before the horse to, you know, permit the -- the mine when this litigation is still ongoing regarding the zoning?

And just kind of encourage the agency to work towards meaningful reforms to the Mining Act. And, you know, I think we need it, especially in the coastal counties that are such a special place. You know, we have so many unique resources, and I'm aware that the CCC program is -- is working to protect them. But at the same time, it's -- it's just concerning how many of these things are popping up. And we can't look at it in a vacuum; we've got to assess the cumulative impacts.

I heard that -- that mining, the other day, is going to discharge up to 200,000 gallons of water a day. You can imagine there's like something like 14 or 15 active mines in this county. How much cumulative groundwater are they all using? Has anyone done that math? I'd be curious to know.

And additionally -- I'm -- I'm sorry. I'm rambling here a little bit. But -- yeah, I just appreciate your time, and, yeah, well, hopefully, you'll take these into consideration while you're evaluating the permit. And if you could please notify me of any decision, that would be great. Thank you.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Thank you. Next, we have Donna.

MS. MCIVER: McIver?
HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: There's no last name.
MS. MCIVER: Oh. Uh-oh.
HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Donna McIver. That's fine.
MS. MCIVER: Sorry.
HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: That's all right.
MR. EDDY: Spell that.
HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Come on down and say and spell your last name for me, please.
MS. MCIVER: Okay. Donna McIver. And it's M-c capital -I-v, as in "Victor," -e-r. And I live at 3164 Heritage Road, and I'm approximately one mile from the proposed Hiers Heritage sand mine. I strongly oppose the mining permit for the Hiers, LLC, Sand Mine on Pine Level Church Road. The Applicant must show adequate measures to prevent pollution, erosion, infiltration, during this mining process. This mining process, transportation of sand will generate significant amounts of fine airborne particulate matter, including silica dust. With the persistent -- persistent coastal winds, these microscopic particles then will inevitably flow into nearby neighboring properties, adversely affecting the health of local families and animals, not to mention the area wildlife. Once airborne,

these particles -- these minute particles drift easily into the air current and are suspended in the air for long periods of time. Breathing of this silica dust seems extremely dangerous because of the microscopic particles that travel deep into the lungs and causing permanent and irreversible scarring, resulting in lung cancer, COPD, and kidney disease. Simply watering down a truckload every three minutes -- which that was what we calculate, every three minutes they're going to have to either water down the truck or water down the road to prevent these microscopic dusts from spreading. I don't think it's quite going to take -- it's -- it's going to do it.

So the sand mining increases the risk of these pollutants, such as fuel, oil, and heavy metals entering the water table. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, sediment latent run-off from mines degrades water quality and harms the ecosystem for decades.

Also, one other topic that we -- that hasn't been mentioned is the Gopher tortoise, which I think they're having Gopher Days real soon. So we might need to change the name if we continue to have the sand mines, as Grant was referring to all

of these sand mines. We might need to change the name of the Gopher -- oh, shoot, I just lost my train of thought -- Gopher Days or whatever it is. The Gopher tortoise is -- this is a area in Grays where the Gopher tortoise is -- makes its home. And the Lowcountry provides a rare pocket of pristine habitat for the Gopher tortoise, which also his burrows provide shelter for over 350 species. Sand mining will negatively affect the habitat for this endangered reptile. Once this land is damaged and altered, it is rarely recovered.

So, please, reconsider. And I'm sure you do, and we appreciate all that you do, but if you would, please, think about the animals that do not have a voice.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Thank you. Next is Paul Moran? All right. Nanci Polk-Weckhorst?

MS. POLK WHITE HORSE: Good evening. I'm Nanci Polk-Weckhorst. That's Nanci, N-a-n-c-i, P-o-l-k, dash, W-e-c-k-h-o-r-s-t. That's Norwegian. I'm from the Polk family from Ireland. I live at 2018 Heritage Road, Highway 3, in Grays, South Carolina. I'm a local resident, landowner, and concerned citizen that lives directly across from Highway 3, within

1,000 feet of the proposed area sand mine site. And my well is approximately 800 feet from the site. I urge South Carolina DES to please deny this Permit Application 1-002464, submitted by Hiers Pine Level, LLC, based on the severe environmental, ecological, and health risks it presents to our rural community.

Some of these critical concerns are: One, the treat -- it treats the groundwater table -- it threatens the groundwater table -- I'm sorry -- and private drinking wells. The sandhill region consists highly of permeable soil that serves as a natural filter for our shallow, unconfined aquifers. Excavation up to -- of up to 58 acres of open pit risks breaching the water table, exposing our primary drinking water sources directly to industrial contaminations and surface runoff.

Furthermore, the active dewatering of mine pits threatens to draw down the water table, potentially running nearby residential wells dry or spoiling them with sediment and drying out the wetlands. I mean, this year is the first time in 25 years that my pond has been as low -- that I've never seen it this low due to the drought. And then we have hundreds of people in the area --

farms in the area whose wells have gone dry this summer.

Okay. Number two, surface water pollution and habitat filtration. Stormwater runoff from stripped, unvegetated sand hills will inevitably carry massive loads of sediment/silt into local wetlands and Cypress Creek Swamp system. This increased turbidity will choke native aquatic vegetations, clog fish's gills, and disrupt delicate local ecosystems, and possibly, all the way to the Coosawhatchie River.

Number three, risk of stagnant, toxic, reclamation ponds. The developers' proposed reclamation plan to convert the open pits into permanent lakes pose little -- long-term ecological damages and dangers. Without a natural, flowing water source, these artificial pits are highly susceptible to trapping agricultural fertilizer runoff from neighboring lands. And this creates a perfect environment for harmful algal blooms and the cyanotoxins that -- turning the site into a permanent poisonous hazard for local wildlife, migratory waterfowl, and terrestrial animals, pets, and humans. Cyanotoxins -- cyanotoxins are caused by blue-green algae blooms in ponds, lakes, and

rivers, and they're very toxic.

Number four, air quality and crystalline silica dust exposure. The mining and transport of sand will generally generate significant amounts of airborne, fine particulate matter, including silica dust, posing chronic respiratory health problems for families, animals, such as the RCS, which is respiratory crystalline silica -- silicosis and lung -- lung cancer. Water trucks mainly just suppress the heavy dust particles only.

In conclusion, we're tired of seeing rural -- rural communities disrupted by a commercial industry for one man's gain. This fight is about preserving a way of life and about protecting our health and well-being. We cannot allow a project that compromises the very air that we breathe and the ground and drinking water. So protect our water, protect our lungs, and no sand mine in Grays, please. Thank you.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Next is Trina Cournoyer.

MS. COURNOYER: That's good. I'll take it.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Okay.

MS. COURNOYER: My name is Trina Cournoyer, C-o-u-r-n-o-y-e-r. I live at 9064 Browning Gate Road, which is approximately a mile and a half from

the site, also in Varnville. Again, I feel like the public has been misled from the beginning. I'm going to say it that it started off at five and ended up at twenty. And it started off as a smaller project, ended up as a larger one. If we can't keep our word now, what's going to happen in the future?

And I'm still worried about the animals and the quality of life. We hunt. We -- this is our way of life. We eat the birds. We eat the fish. We eat the -- the -- the deer. What's going to happen, you know, when these animals starve because the dust is -- and it's a fact -- it's been a known fact that, once they start it, it lands on the leaves, and the vegetation, the grass -- it -- it suppresses their eating habits, and they starve. And then, eventually, we starve, because that's what we live on here. This is our way of life.

I just don't know why we keep letting the snakes shed their skins while we pay the price, and that's what's happening over and over and over. And I think that if Jasper -- Jasper County continues in this direction, they need to change their flag. No more wildlife on it. Put excavators and bulldozers on it, and that's how I

feel.

This is not -- this is not about the people. It -- it's becoming more about the elites. Because we're talking about the water; we're talking about sand mines. We also have data centers now that are coming into our area that have been sucking the water out of our areas. These in combination are going to be more harmful. Nobody knows what's going to happen in the future. I mean -- I mean, we're at -- we're at a mercy right now, begging for our lives. That's all I have to say.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Do we have Chris Junior? He left? How about John Holloway?

MR. HOLLOWAY: Good evening. My name's John Holloway, J-o-h-n, H-o-l-l-o-w-a-y. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this activity. I appreciate the SCDES personnel and their time arranging this meeting and hearing and take the time to thoughtfully consider our comments and objections to this activity. As a concerned resident of this county, long-term South Carolina state resident, I respectfully requests that SCDES deny this mining activity permit for this property or any other property in this rural area of Jasper County.

So I reside -- I reside at 3605 Rivers Hill Road, which is about 25 miles away from the site. I'm employed by the US Marine Corps on Paris Island as wildlife biologist and its resource manager. Been working in this arena for about 41 years. And so, after due diligence and research and many property searches, I purchased the property on -- on Rivers Hill Road in Grays, 2019, as my primary residence. So we moved to Grays because of its privacy, quiet solitude, and we enjoy the rural landscape, the wildlife, and the unmatched beauty of rural Jasper County. We chose rural Jasper County because of the natural beauty, quiet roads, less traffic noise than in the more developed areas of Beaufort County. This appealed to our sense of place and a desire to live where nature still exists. And we chose Grays because of its rural nature.

We believe this proposed sand mine is about to change all that. The threat of tremendous amount -- amounts of long-term, heavy truck -- truck traffic -- I realize that's not part of your purview here, but if you permit this mine, it will be something we have to live with for 10 to 20 years. We don't -- we don't want that. Along with

the noise, activity, wildlife death/disruption, dust, damaged roads, and threats to safety, welfare, and degradation of the environment and quality of life for me and my family.

This proposed sand mine will directly and adversely impact me, my family, my property, my neighbors, and the community in several ways. The mine built will be to increased traffic, noise, other disruptions to the area's rural -- or rural character. Clearcutting of the pine forest will adversely impact wildlife and the natural resources that make Grays so unique. The wetlands on this site -- not only the site that they're digging the mine, but adjacent to the site, property owners -- adjacent property owners and this particular 265-acre property will be impacted. Water wells may be impacted. Pollution from the sand mine, including exhaust fumes and silica dust will adversely impact air quality. This activity will also lead to wear and tear on roadways, up to 75 or more trucks in and out weekdays, from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. And, again, I know that's not your purview, but we have to live with that if it's permitted.

And the -- so I guess as part of this permit application there was a development agreement

through Jasper County where there's some conflicting information. They were allowing 60 feet depths; you're allowing 30 feet depths. Who's going to monitor that to make sure it stays at 30 feet and not 60? Do the county regulations or the county development agreement -- do they -- will they be allowed to -- to proceed with whatever's allowed in that development. We hope not. It's going to be even worse.

The mine will destroy the general peacefulness and tranquility of Grays. And, finally, the sand mine will operate for the next 10 to 20 years. Again, the development agreement lists 20 years potential mining land -- we don't want that -- which will further degrade the tranquil, rural character of Jasper County.

And in reviewing the -- the operating permit for this new mine and the attachments that were submitted, numerous inconsistencies were noted, and pertinent information in the surveys were left out. And I've listed -- I've got about two pages of stuff here I'm going to leave -- leave with you. I'm not going to go through it tonight. But it's -- will part of the record, right? Okay. Then that's all I -- all I have.

But, I guess, in closing, just thank you for your time and considering our comments and objections to this, and based on -- on the public that live here and the community concerns for the impacts of this activity on community health and environment and based on Applicant's inconsistencies, please do not approve this request. Thank you.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Thank you. Jeff Hiers, would you like to speak?

MR. HIERS: Unh-unh.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Decline? Donna Gerald?

MS. GERALD: No thank you.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: All right. Ryan Lyle?

MR. LYLE: No comment.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Glenn Rivers?

MR. RIVERS: Yes, I'll speak

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Come on to the microphone, please.

MR. RIVERS: My name is Glenn Rivers. That's G-l-e-n-n, R-i-v-e-r-s. I live at 13586 Grays Highway, Early Branch, South Carolina. I'd like to speak on the crescendo effect of having this mine happen and rural preservations of Jasper County. Once you allow this to happen, you've opened the floodgates

for whatever else. This is not something that's going to benefit anybody in the neighborhood except for Mr. Hiers, maybe his lawyers and his real estate agent. But otherwise, it's not going to benefit us. We don't -- we don't want it. That's why we're here; we don't want it. We have a way of life and have one of the most pristine areas left in Jasper County, and this is the -- unpopping the cork to -- to, you know, turning it into the swamps of Hardeeville, which have a million houses put in it.

And, you know, you're not going from -- you're going from rural preservation all the way to industrial. We're not taking any steps in between for, like, housing or anything. We're going from nothing to wide open. And it just seems wrong for our area. I, myself -- my property doesn't touch the -- the sand line, but every grain of sand -- every truck that goes in to pick up a grain of sand and when it returns back is going to pass my house. My house is a house that was built by my grandfather, and I am probably 60 feet off the highway, so you can imagine the vibration, dust, fumes that are going to come off of every truck. And if you follow these trucks down the road,

sand's just blowing off of them as they go down; there's nothing -- you know, by the time it gets to my house whatever water you put on it at the mine is gone, and it's going to be just blowing sand.

So for the health reasons, the environmental reasons, and just the, you know, continuity of rural Jasper County, this is a bad thing, and I certainly hope that you do not allow it to happen. Thank you.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Thank you, sir. Tom Johnson?

MR. JOHNSON: No -- no comment.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Cathy de Courcy?

MS. DE COURCY: Decline.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: All right. David Sesler? Decline? All right. That concludes everyone who signed up to comment tonight. If anyone else wishes to speak, please raise your hand.

HEARING OFFICER SAWYER: Seeing no additional speakers, the comment portion of this hearing is now closed.

On behalf of SCDES, thank you for attending and sharing your comments. All comments will be reviewed, and if necessary, additional information may be requested from the Applicant. A decision to approve or deny the permit will then be issued. At that time, a summary response to comments and the

final decision will be sent to everyone on the mailing list and will be posted online. If you would like to receive this notice by certified mail, please submit that request in writing by October 16th, 2026. The time is now 7:32 p.m. and this public hearing is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the public hearing was concluded at 7:32 p.m.)

(*This transcript may contain quoted material. Such material is reproduced as read or quoted by the speaker.)

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)

CERTIFICATE

Be it known that Julie Taradash took the foregoing proceeding and hereby attests:

that I was then and there a notary public in and for the State of South Carolina-at-large and that by virtue thereof I was duly authorized to administer an oath;

that the deponent/witness, if any, was first duly sworn to testify to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, concerning the matter in the controversy aforesaid;

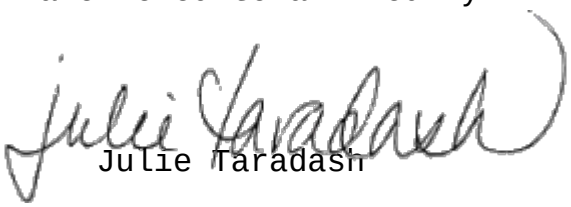
that the foregoing transcript represents a true, accurate, and complete transcription of the testimony so given at the time and place aforesaid to the best of my skill and ability;

that I am neither a relative nor an employee of any of the parties hereto, nor of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor interested in the outcome of this action;

that, if a recording of an event was supplied by another party for purposes of transcription and I was not present during that event, the foregoing pages were transcribed to the best of my skill and ability; additionally, any identifications of speakers were provided to me by the party supplying the recording;

that, in the event of a nonappearance by the witness, the foregoing details for the nonappearance are accurate.

In witness thereof, I have hereunto affixed my signature and title.



Julie Taradash

Date: 10/16/2026
Notary public for South Carolina
My commission expires March 27, 2035
*Unless otherwise noted, this notary public administered the oath. Please refer to the transcript for any exceptions.
**For details on reading and signing, please refer to the transcript.