FAQs ON GRAVEL MINING IN ONTARIO

What is wrong with the way gravel mining is managed in Ontario?

Gravel Mining is not a benign activity. It destroys the natural environment and changes communities forever. Gravel is a finite resource and while still in the ground it supports productive farmland, groundwater water filtration, flood mediation and other natural capital services. It is also an important resource to the manufacturing and construction industries. Gravel companies are not required to demonstrate that new sources of gravel mining are required. As a result, companies engage in a 'wild west claim staking' approach of seeking multiple approvals in order to bank land for future extraction. Greg Sweetnam, VP of James Dick Construction Ltd., makes the preposterous claim that they operate on a 300-year time horizon. A more rational approach to the management of gravel mining is required to ensure we give consideration to both protecting the environment and our agricultural and industrial needs.

Will a moratorium on new gravel mining approvals mean developments that use gravel are postponed? For example, will Ontario be able to build transit and a denser urban footprint if there is a moratorium?

The government of Ontario has already authorized the gravel mining industry to extract thirteen times more gravel each year than is required to meet average annual consumption.

- On average 157.4 million tonnes of gravel was extracted annually over the past 10 years in Ontario.[1,2]
- 2.05 billion tonnes of gravel extraction are authorized each year from the 5,000-plus licensed gravel mining sites in Ontario. (Note: 800-plus sites, {approximately 15%} are permitted to extract unlimited tonnages each year. These amounts are in addition to the annual 2.05 billion tonnes already noted.)

How much additional land is consumed every year on average by gravel mining?

Gravel mining consumes an average of 5,000 additional acres of land in Ontario each year. Licences for gravel extraction have increased from 183,000 acres in 1992 to 333,000 acres in 2020, an increase of 150,000 acres or 5,000 acres per year over the past three decades. That's a land area equivalent to two proposed Melancthon mega-quarries each year.[3]

When gravel mining destroys farmland, can the farmland be restored to its previous productivity?

As stated by the National Farmers Union of Ontario (NFU-O): "Provincial legislation continues to insist that agricultural land, once mined for aggregates, can continue to be as productive as before, a fact which is simply not true. This belief in the success of rehabilitation means that even our prime agricultural and specialty crop areas are being mined for aggregates. When this happens, we are permanently

losing production capabilities from our best agricultural lands". They also caution: "Once aggregates are removed from beneath prime agricultural land, ... full rehabilitation is impossible. The good drainage of 'gravel-bottom' land is what makes the land so valuable as farmland".[4]

And Skelton Brumwell Associates state: "When aggregate extraction occurs, the layers of soil on top of the aggregate deposits are scraped off and, in this process, mixed up, which destroys the soil horizons. This means that, even if the land is rehabilitated back to a condition where agriculture is possible, it can never be as productive as it was before. The horizons of the soil have been destroyed, and the soil is no longer ideal for growing crops. In fact, studies show that even if the land is rehabilitated back to what aggregate companies describe as an 'agricultural condition', it will never achieve the productivity it had before the extraction".[5]

Does the current process for approving new applications for gravel mining in Ontario provide a 'level playing field' between the gravel mining companies, local communities and other interest?

The permitting process for gravel mining is tilted in favour of the aggregate extraction industry[6], a sector dominated by multinational corporations headquartered far away from the damage they cause. These companies and their consultants have decades of experience and well-developed tactics to intimidate, exhaust, outspend and outlast communities and municipal councils.

Community groups opposing gravel mine applications must organize from scratch, while facing formidable corporations with inexhaustible resources to pay high-priced lawyers, captured experts, lobbyists and consultants. Community volunteers must spend countless hours learning complex planning, transportation, hydrogeology, air quality, noise, blasting and other technical specialties. They are often forced to raise hundreds of thousands of after tax dollars to retain lawyers, planners and technical experts, all to navigate a process in which corporations set the pace and intensity. In these 'David vs. Goliath' struggles, communities must represent themselves at quasi-legal hearings often in front of a single, unaccountable official. Commonly, community members discover they have little or no control over gravel mining and what it does to their homes, their family's health and safety, their communities and the natural environment.

What are some examples that show how the current process favours the interests of gravel mining companies and leads to undesirable outcomes?

Mount Nemo: In 2004 Nelson Aggregate applied to establish a new quarry on the Mount Nemo plateau of the Niagara Escarpment in Burlington. The application was opposed by the City of Burlington, Halton Region, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Halton Conservation Authority. After an eight-year process, involving millions of taxpayer's dollars, the application was denied in October, 2012 by the Ontario Office of Consolidated Hearings. Seven years later, Nelson Aggregate have applied for two new quarries. One of these sites is in almost exactly the same place as the site denied in 2012. The sensitivity and ecological importance of the lands that make up this UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve are the same now as in 2012. No should mean no. But the residents of Burlington are again forced to protect the public interest against the relentless private interests of a multinational corporation.

Acton Quarry: The dormant (since 2019) Dufferin Aggregates / CRH Quarry in Acton Ontario is licensed to produce 4 million tonnes of gravel per year. This is 2.5 times the amount of new license applications for gravel mining by James Dick Construction Ltd., located within 21 kilometres of the existing Acton Quarry. (Rockwood Hidden Quarry 700,000 tonnes, interim approval; proposed Campbellville Quarry 900,000 tonnes)

Proposed Hallman Pit: There are seven existing pits located on the south side of Witmer Road across the road from the proposed Hallman Pit. The 200,000 tonnes per year extracted from these existing seven pits is only 10% of the total licensed capacity (approximately 2 million tonnes per year). Despite this existing supply Rick Esbaugh seeks approval to mine up to 750,000 tonnes of aggregate annually at the proposed Hallman Pit. This is almost four times as much gravel as is produced every year from the seven existing pits.

What is the relationship between gravel mining and climate change?

The climate crisis requires society to reduce carbon emissions and to conserve water and natural habitat. Gravel is the feedstock to new highways and urban sprawl. Most aggregates are used to manufacture cement and construct buildings, roads, bridges, sewers and other infrastructure. The cement industry produces 8% of global carbon emissions—as a country, it is the third largest global emitter of CO_2.[7] Road construction and maintenance are also major contributors to climate change, as building more high-capacity roads leads to more driving and sprawl, and more destruction of the natural environment.[8]

What opportunities are created if Ontario says "yes" to a moratorium on new gravel mining approvals?

Ontario will have the opportunity to chart a new path forward for gravel mining which:

- Protects groundwater and farmland
- Increases the weight of local perspectives in land use planning
- Ensures long term supplies of a finite resource
- Honour treaties with Indigenous Nations and obligations as prescribed in the Canadian Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Prevents greater climate chaos

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1. Aggregate Resources Statistics in Ontario, Production Statistics annual reports, The Ontario Aggregate Resources Corporation (TOARC)
2. Active aggregate sites and related maximum tonnage
3. https://www.inthehills.ca/2011/06/melancthon-mega-quarry-by-the-numbers
4. https://www.nfu.ca/nfu-recommends-that-the-highlands-companies-application-for-melancthon-quarry-berejected/
5. https://ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/2020/07/02/the-impacts-of-aggregate-mining-on-farmland/
6. http://cielap.org/pdf/AggregatesStrategyOntario.pdf, p. 15
7. https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-why-cement-emissions-matter-for-climate-change
8. https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Impact_of_Highway_Capacity_and_Induced_Travel_on_Passenger_Vehicle_Use_and_Greenhouse_Gas_Emissions_Policy_Brief.pdf