

McMaster students dive into St Mary's application

BY DON REDMOND

A contentious water-permit application by St. Mary's has flowed beyond the immediate community and splashed down into the halls of academia.

Flamborough Councillor Margaret McCarthy told the Compass aside from the concerns expressed by both herself and quarry opponents FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment) regarding St. Mary's permit to take water (PTTW), McMaster students have submerged themselves into the issue.

"This is a very interesting study done by McMaster University students," said McCarthy. "They have written about the Permit To Take Water by St. Mary's. They have reproduced my meeting materials from September 2006 for background and have taken it further by saying that the PTTW appears to be 'contrary to the intent of the Clean Water Act'."

The PTTW, submitted by Gartner Lee Limited on behalf of St. Mary's, calls for 12.7 million litres of water to be drawn daily for a 20-day period from the quarry site at 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Townline, across the street from dozens of Campbellville residents. St. Mary's is hoping to prove its water recirculation program, whereby drawn water is returned to the aquifer, is successful.

However, both McCarthy and FORCE have grave concerns over the amount of water being drawn, which equals more than three times the amount being pulled by the Carlisle well system.

And it would seem the McMaster students agree with them, saying the application would draw "a quarter billion litres" in total.

Beyond noting that the entire area has been deemed "provincially significant wetland as well as an environmentally sensitive area for more than two decades" by the Ontario government itself, the study further noted that "the case study application for PTTW appears to be contrary to the intent of the Clean Water Act just recently passed on October 18th, 2006. This legislation is intended to give Ontarians the best protected drinking water in the world."

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The students also examined a Ministry of Environment (MoE) decision made earlier in the year, regarding a local business, Flamboro Springs Water, and their PTTW application, contrasting the two applications. "A decision was issued by the MoE on March 31st, 2006, restricted that applicant, Flamborough Springs, to an increase in water taking of 8,000 litres per day. The Flamborough Springs well is roughly one kilometre away from the case study site where this application for a PTTW specifies drawing water at a rate of 8,800 litres per minute."

Both McCarthy and FORCE have urged local residents to state their concerns directly to Cora Sheppard, the MoE's PTTW Coordinator for their West Central Regional Office in Hamilton. The decision will be made on the application by December 1. (Concerned Campbellville residents can contact her at: Cora.Sheppard@ontario.ca or by phone, 905-521-7587 and fax, 905-521-7820.) FORCE has included a letter template on its website www.stopthequarry.ca.

Among the concerns FORCE suggests should be asked to the PTTW office are: why should intrusive tests be conducted into the community's aquifer when a number of other matters such as transportation remain unresolved; the sheer volume of water being extracted; the volume being discharged into Mountsberg Creek and the environment impact of that and the potential of "aquifer fracturing" that the tests could cause.

McCarthy had already emailed Sheppard with a number of concerns, including those submitted by FORCE but added that she believes "there is a great potential for contamination of the ground water aquifer. If the proposed tests are successful, groundwater will be taken out of the aquifer, exposed to potential surface contaminants and changes in temperature, and then transported directly back into the aquifer. Groundwater will become surface water, and then immediately become groundwater once again. How will the safety of our groundwater supply be ensured during such a process? Changes in temperature can, for example, contribute to bacteriological growth within the aquifer itself."

As well, she said her residents need to know "what potential impacts can be expected from blasting. Fracturing the aquifer may cause impacts to groundwater users well beyond the proposed quarry boundary."

The St. Mary's quarry application itself was a hot-button issue during Milton's recent municipal election. Re-elected Ward 1-3 Regional Councillor Barry Lee suggested that Milton should never upgrade the roads that the St. Mary's quarry trucks would be using through Campbellville. However, defeated Ward 3 challenger Rick Matchett had perhaps the most proactive solution, suggested that truck weight limits should be put on the roads to be used by the gravel trucks immediately, basically forbidding them from crossing into Campbellville before the quarry application is either approved or declined.