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FORCE calls for Greenbelt legislation reform

Dianne Cornish

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An anti-quarry group in Flamborough has joined more than 80 organizations in the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance to endorse significant changes in legislation governing the approval process, regulation and operation of quarries.

In launching its Green Gravel Campaign last week, the Alliance, which includes Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE) in Flamborough, urged the Ontario government to adopt sweeping changes in the governance of the aggregate industry. The Greenbelt priorities paper issued by the group calls for changes to The Aggregate Resources Act, the Planning Act, the Greenbelt Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act and the Oak Ridges Conservation Act.

The proposed changes would put a stop to the industry policing itself and ban new aggregate extraction in Ontario's 1.8-million acre greenbelt, as well as on the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine and prime agricultural land in Ontario.

It would also redesign licensing and permit approvals to make the process fairer to the public. Under the current legislation, the aggregate industry can take years to prepare a complex quarry application and the public is given just 45 days to respond and counter the proposal under the Aggregate Resources Act.

"Aggregates are important to society, used in our homes, schools, hospitals, roads and transit," FORCE chair Graham Flint acknowledged. "But their extraction has inherently detrimental effects on our air, water, climate and quality of life. A finer balance needs to be struck."

The Green Gravel campaign is directed at all parties within the Ontario government. "It's not a coincidence that the campaign was launched now," Flint said, referring to the October 10 provincial election and the opportunity it affords to get the call for legislative reform in the limelight.

"Ideally, we would like to see one or more political parties incorporate it (aggregate industry reform) into their platforms," Flint said last week. He noted that provincial candidates will be asked to take a position on the green gravel campaign and their responses will be put on FORCE's website at www.stopthequarry.ca.

FORCE has opposed an application for a 340-acre quarry at 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line since the proposal was made three years ago. It has consistently argued that the quarry is inappropriate for the rural Flamborough setting because of a number of environmental issues, including the presence of provincially significant wetlands and significant woodlots on the site. The proposed site is also in the greenbelt.

One of the cornerstones of the Greenbelt priorities paper is that government develop and put in place a long-term conservation strategy for stone, sand and gravel. The Greenbelt Alliance wants the government to adopt a 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) strategy, with quantifiable targets, along with the use of alternative and composite materials. It suggests that fees paid by the aggregate industry be increased to fund the 3Rs innovations and the proposed regulatory framework.

Another conservation measure is that the government optimize the thousands of existing aggregate extraction licenses before issuing new ones.

It has been 10 years since the last overhaul of The Aggregate Resources Act, Flint said. At that time, amendments empowered the aggregate industry "to be self-regulating, to manage themselves," he said. It's time "to move the pendulum back" so the industry is better regulated, Flint suggested, arguing that the industry should not be policing itself.

The FORCE chair also stressed that the Greenbelt Act, which allows for quarries and highways in the greenbelt provided certain conditions are met, needs to be tightened up. "The province has created this jewel (the greenbelt), but it's got a back door," he said, referring to the proposal by St. Marys Cement to establish a new quarry in the greenbelt.



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