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Environmental Defence joins quarry battle

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The Hamilton Spectator

The national non-profit group Environmental Defence is urging the Ontario government not to allow new quarries or quarry expansions in the Greenbelt and to extend greenspace protection into the Town of Oakville and Brant County.

The quarry ban would affect both St. Marys Cement's plan for a large limestone quarry north of Carlisle in Flamborough and Nelson Quarry's bid to expand in north Burlington.

Environmental Defence (ED), a founding member of the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance, says: "Until such time as Ontario reconciles its priorities between the protection of natural heritage features and source water and the extraction of aggregates, and until the province modernizes its aggregates laws and policies, there should be no new quarries, or quarry expansions, in the Greenbelt."

ED also warns about urban sprawl leapfrogging over the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt into places such as Brant and Simcoe counties. It supports calls to expand the belt into Guelph, Oakville, Markham, Brant, Mississauga, Toronto and Prince Edward County.

The anti-quarry recommendation comes as the City of Burlington seeks permanent protection for the Mount Nemo Plateau, site of the Nelson Quarry, supporting Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) objections to the Nelson expansion and NEC plans to tighten control of the plateau.

The ED recommendation also comes as nearly 900 people and organizations from Flamborough and across the GTA tell St. Marys and the Ministry of Natural Resources that they oppose the St. Marys quarry application.

Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE) reports that it has delivered almost 900 objection letters to St. Marys and the Natural Resources Ministry, letters it says were sent by farmers, other local residents and businesses as well as hundreds of supporters across the GTA who value north Flamborough for its cycling, hiking, food production and natural features.

The aggregate company gave the public an initial 45 days to respond to its application last spring, then waited seven months before triggering another 20-day period during which the original objectors were asked to confirm their positions while others were free to add their names.

FORCE says opposition remains strong because St. Marys has done little during the seven months to resolve issues, chief among them concern over the effects on drinking water wells in the area.

The community group says the cities of Burlington and Hamilton, as well as other public agencies, have not yet been asked by St. Marys to confirm their objections, but the Hamilton-Wentworth and Halton federations of agriculture, Balaclava Public School and ED were notified and have confirmed.

FORCE chair Graham Flint says: "St. Marys gave us no reasons to withdraw our objections. Our objections were, and remain, broad and substantial. ... We call on the province and the City of Hamilton to stop the quarry."

Melanie Horton, speaking for St. Marys, said, "St. Marys remains committed to working with the agencies and the community to try to resolve objections." She said St. Marys had met with public and FORCE reps to discuss concerns.

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