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St. Marys files appeal of order halting quarry

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St. Marys Cement has announced it is appealing the province's unprecedented order halting its attempts to build a limestone quarry in Flamborough.

The Toronto-based company said it had filed an appeal yesterday with Municipal Affairs Minister Jim Bradley to have his zoning order quashing the quarry put before the Ontario Municipal Board for a hearing.

Bradley issued his order April 13, declaring the 150-hectare site north of Carlisle must remain zoned "rural and conservation management" in perpetuity. St. Marys has been working on turning the 11th Concession site into a quarry since 2006, but ran into opposition from a citizens' group, local councils, municipal staff and MPP and former cabinet minister Ted McMeekin.

St. Marys has spent \$20 million on its effort.

"As we have stated before, St. Marys was surprised and disappointed by this unprecedented decision and we believe the Ontario government has made a grave error," St. Marys Cement vice-president John Moroz said in a statement.

"Our application was making its way through the rigorous provincially and municipally mandated processes and we believe -- if the project is assessed on its merits -- it will be ultimately approved."

Company spokesperson Julie Bellissimo declined further comment.

Opponents were worried about the quarry's impact on groundwater, road safety, noise and the loss of wetlands.

Graham Flint, chairperson of Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE), said he was disappointed by St. Marys' decision but was not surprised. He said FORCE will encourage the province to stick with its decision.

FORCE is holding a community celebration on Sunday at 1 p.m. at the Carlisle Golf and Country Club.

"This is a milestone," said Flint. "We feel the momentum has changed, but we're going to acknowledge the fight is not over yet."

McMeekin said Bradley has to refer St. Marys' appeal to the OMB, but he understood that 30 days before a hearing begins, the province can declare the site of provincial interest. The issue would then go before cabinet for a final decision and it has already supported Bradley's order.

"I'm not worried," he said.

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