

# The Ontario Headwaters Institute

Preserving Ontario's headwaters, the foundation of our watersheds

April 22, 2011

TO: Mr. Craig Laing, Aggregate Inspector AND  
Ministry of Natural Resources  
Regional Operations Division  
Southern Region, Midhurst District  
2284 Nursery Road  
Midhurst Ontario, L0L 1X0  
The Highland Companies  
Box 377  
Shelburne, ON, L0N 1S0

**RE: Comments on MNR Instrument #19/11**

Please accept this letter as containing our comments on the application of 3191574 Nova Scotia Company for a Class "A" licence to excavate aggregate.

Please also note that the bulk of this letter has also been submitted to posting 011-2864 on the EBR Registry.

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We wish to register our objection to this application, based on the three key aspects described below.

1. Inadequate Watershed Science

The statements in the proponent's studies about minimal intrusiveness, best practices, and mitigated impacts with respect to groundwater, headwaters, and source protection are well-intentioned but made at a time when Ontario's science knowledge of these issues are immature and when monitoring has not been able to attain a level of cumulative comfort.

While we understand that society and its business innovators should not have to suffer unreasonable delay waiting for science and policy to evolve, the unprecedented size of this site, its penetration 65 M below the water table, the requirement for perpetual pumping of an extraordinary volume of water, and the potential for disruption to both local wells and to regional ecosystems requires that society embrace the precautionary principle and not the ecological uncertainties inherent in the proposal.

Currently, Ontario is grappling with reviewing the PPS; the Environmental Commissioner has called for Integrated Watershed Management and cumulative monitoring; watershed water budgets and groundwater mapping are just being rolled out and verified; the province's agencies have registered the scientific conditions for third stage Low Water advisories but have never issued one due to administrative problems; and Source Water Protection has still not yet been extended into rural areas dependent on wells.

Clearly, this is not the time to rely on proponent assurances and licence this proposal.

2. Disruption to Agriculture as a Viable Local Industry

Unlike smaller quarries that might have lesser impact, the proposed quarry will take significant agricultural lands out of sustainable use, and out of the service of feeding Ontarians. The licence should therefore not be granted.

We also wish to suggest that it is inappropriate for the province to support agriculture in general, and in targeted areas, and allow lands in other areas to be “assembled” into a financial portfolio, with its implied requirement for secrecy and lack-of-forthrightness.

The province should, therefore, endeavour to: establish a code of practice regarding efforts to assemble agricultural lands for development purposes; amend its policies for the promotion of sustainable agriculture; enhance the protection of agricultural lands under the PPS; consider land-banking and other methods to help transition farms from retiring to emerging farmers; and address tax and compensation issues faced by farmers.

3. Impacts on the Local and Global Communities

It is difficult to square two aspects of the proponent’s studies. On one hand, it appears that up to 7,200 trucks may be on local roads. These trucks will impact the local community by generating traffic congestion and safety issues, and increase road deterioration, noise, dust, and both particulate and greenhouse gas emissions. The last two of these will also impact regional public health and both regional and global ecological integrity.

On the other hand, the executive summary of Level 1 and Level II Natural Environment Technical Report and Environmental Impact Study states:

“The diversity, connectivity and function of the natural features and natural heritage systems in the Study Area and beyond will be maintained and improved, including linkages between natural heritage features, surface water features, and groundwater features.”

This statement represents a degree of posturing that we consider both absolutely unacceptable and ultimately revealing.

Just as the size of the proposed quarry is unprecedented, so are its assumptions about watershed science, its impact on local agriculture, and its unfettered hubris in claiming natural heritage improvements, “in the Study Area and beyond”. The licence should be denied.

Sincerely,

*Andrew McCammon*

Andrew McCammon  
Executive Director