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From: PERL

To: perl1@cogeco.ca

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Subject: Information on the Green Gravel Campaign from PERL

Hello

We are pleased to forward you an article by John Barber recently published in the Globe and Mail regarding the Green Gravel campaign. As a founding member of the Green Gravel Coalition, Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL) is pleased to see such strong support for this new initiative from Ontario's Environment Commissioner and other environmental leaders.

The aim of the Green Gravel Certification process is to help protect Ontario's precious wetlands, woodlands, groundwater, geological features, natural heritage systems and Species at Risk, by giving the consumers and purchasers of mineral aggregates (municipalities, developers, homeowners) the option to use their purchasing powers to source their mineral aggregates from non-environmentally sensitive areas. Thus help protect our best remaining natural lands from open-pit mining. This would work in a similar way to the FSC certification.

You can find more information and links about Green Gravel on our website at www.perlofburlington.org. If you have any questions about the Green Gravel campaign or wish to comment, we would love to hear from you.

The PERL Executive

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Want to keep quarries from scarring the GTA countryside? Buy green gravel

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April 19, 2008

High-density living is green. Toronto must grow up, not out. So let's all buy a condo and save the planet. But before we get carried away, let's take account of the unwritten bargain embedded in virtually every single act of city building, Toronto style - the standard clause that, in return for granting us towers and sidewalks and schools, demands we simultaneously destroy the last semblance of idyllic nature within sight of them.

All that concrete and asphalt has to come from somewhere. For reasons that last made sense in the 1960s, if then, the standard clause decrees that booming Toronto's enormous appetite for crushed stone be satisfied largely by an expanding collection of proportionately enormous quarries located in the otherwise unspoiled hills and valleys just beyond our sprawl.

These are the same escarpment and moraine lands now protected in perpetuity by a barricade of provincial statutes so thick it has won international applause as a model of its type. Aided by loopholes through which the aggregate industry directs a never-ending convoy of 20-tonne trucks, we are thoughtlessly destroying them.

The new Toronto-region greenbelt comprehensively bans urban development on our unspoiled borderlands, but leaves them wide open to the aggregate industry to rip apart as it sees fit. The Niagara Escarpment is a UNESCO World Biosphere Preserve, protected by pioneering legislation that has kept development at bay for decades. Yet it remains heavily scarred by pits and quarries, with a few more being planned even today - most notoriously a proposal to scalp dramatic Mount Nemo north of Burlington.

Provincial policy gives the industry "preferential access" to even the most well-protected conservation lands, according to Gord Miller, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, an official government watchdog and critic of its laissez-faire attitude toward the aggregate-industry. "All of the applications to quarry the Niagara Escarpment, which is historically our most sensitive and regulated land area, have eventually gone to a 'yes' over the years," he says.

The process to approve new sites is cumbersome but only produces one result, according to the commissioner. "You enter into it and it moves toward a 'yes,'" he says.

Making little headway with his official campaign to reform the industry, Mr. Miller is hoping a new citizen-based campaign will have better luck. Led by the increasingly powerful Ontario Greenbelt Alliance, the "green gravel" campaign hopes to force the industry to adopt higher environmental standards. "It's high time the aggregate industry was held to a higher standard," says Rick Smith of Environmental Defence, a founding group of the 80-member greenbelt alliance.

He accuses the industry of abusing its historical privileges in order to "steamroll" over community concerns with "cockamamie arguments" about the need to crush stone near markets. "The gravel industry does not seem to have a compromising bone in its body," he says.

Unlike every previous attempt over a half-century of intermittent effort, the new green gravel campaign could work. Bypassing provincial quicksand, it is focusing on concrete consumers, beginning with a call to municipal governments to stop buying gravel quarried from conservation lands.

Ultimately the green gravel campaign hopes to replicate the success of the Forest Stewardship Council, which developed a universally accepted standard to denote sustainably harvested lumber.

"Gravel is already green," insists Carol Hochu, president of the Ontario Stone, Sand & Gravel Association, who recently wrote a detailed critique of the alliance's position in a letter to Premier McGuinty. The industry is making great strides, the letter pointed out, in part because of the environmental commissioner's agitation.

The industry boasts of a handful of successful reclamation projects and increased use of recycled concrete. In addition to abandoned pits, hikers now encounter signs attesting to such efforts, often undertaken in co-operation with local conservation authorities. But for his part, Mr. Miller, the environmental commissioner, calls the new campaign "a great idea" - and he wonders why the few progressive companies in the industry aren't rushing to embrace environmental certification.

That's likely because none of them is currently losing customers without it. But that could change quickly once Toronto council gets hold of the issue.