

Auditor General's report on aggregate finds 'limited enforcement' of industry transgressions

Caledon group supports call for moratorium on new aggregate extraction operations

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A Caledon group is calling on the Province to stop approval of any new aggregate extraction operations.

On December 18, the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group (FCPG) joined the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition (RGMC) in calling on the Ontario government to introduce 'an immediate moratorium on new aggregate approvals, in order to implement the recommendations presented by the Auditor General in the Value-for-Money Audit of the Management of Aggregate Resources.'

A report on this audit was published by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario on December 6 and presented a variety of findings about the level of inspection and enforcement going on at aggregate operations across Ontario.

The audit said there is an inadequate number of inspections of aggregate pits and quarries being done by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and a shortage of experienced inspectors in Ontario.

As of May 2023, there were only 34 designated inspectors.

This contributes to aggregate pits and quarries not adhering to extraction limits and other requirements, such as rehabilitation requirements, the report reads.

The audit found only 35 per cent of aggregate sites it reviewed had been inspected in the past five years.

'Despite high rates of non-compliance, inspectors rarely referred cases for enforcement. From 2018 to 2022, only 36 to 52 per cent of sites inspected each year were compliant,' reads the report. 'In the same five years, inspectors referred only 26 cases, less than one per cent of the over 3,400 violations identified during this time, for enforcement.'

The audit also found cases where operators had exceeded their extraction limits 'in three cases by over 1,000 per cent' and were still not investigated or charged.

In a media release, acting Auditor General Nick Stavropoulos said regular inspections and enforcement of pits and quarries are required to minimize impacts on communities and the environment.

'Limited inspection and enforcement, and the lack of experienced inspectors, means that the Province is not doing enough to maintain a balance between the need for aggregates for Ontario's growing population, and the need to minimize the impacts of aggregate operations on the environment and communities,' said Stavropoulos.

In its own media release, the RGMC said the management of aggregate resources in Ontario is in crisis.

'The province is failing to protect the public from the negative impacts of gravel mining,' reads the release. 'The Ontario government must pull the emergency brake and halt new approvals until it can guarantee public safety by enforcing the Auditor General's common-sense proposals.'

David Donnelly is an environmental lawyer working for the FCPG and RGMC. He said the aggregate industry has long claimed to

be well-regulated, and that the recent audit proves this isn't true.

The FCPG wants the Town of Caledon and Region of Peel to join it and the RGMC in saying no to new aggregate operations.