

The Impact is Forever

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Other than 'forever,' there is quite literally no other way to state the full impact of continued pit and quarry development in Caledon. The impact to the land, our agricultural systems, our waterways, to species at risk, the environment and even our roads, villages and hamlets will permanently change our landscape. Sure, the Brazilians (Votorantim being the Brazilian owned parent company of the most recent proposed quarry) will promise 'rehabilitation' and all kinds of 'mitigation' measures, but surely we all know that digging a massive hole in the ground, augmenting its depths by blasting it with dynamite to make an even bigger hole (below the water table no less) will achieve nothing less than complete decimation of the land around us, making Caledon land poor and the Brazilians cash rich.

Perhaps you live in Southfields, Bolton, or maybe even Palgrave and so, because this issue isn't happening on your front door step you think there's no direct impact and therefore aren't too concerned. You should be. To begin, over 16,600 acres of Caledon is considered to have 'high potential' (that's specifically quarry and/or pit potential) so the first question you should be asking yourself is; 'If not now, when?' Next, you may want to undertake a review of the by-law processes, land-use application processes and all the related legal, environmental and municipal processes related to allowing pit development because, well, 'If not now, when?' Perhaps it won't be a pit or a quarry that you are staring down in your little corner of Caledon (although there's a good chance it will be) but whatever precedent is set in decisions made during this battle against Votorantim will surely resonate throughout the town for decades to come. A certain asphalt plant comes to mind.

Maybe you like your part of Caledon, and it's somewhat removed from the current areas facing defacement. If so, that's great for you, but if you occasionally plan on visiting other areas in the community, to enjoy the beauty that it offers, you may find your drive dangerous due to the sheer volume of fully loaded rigs on the roads and you'll discover nothing to admire when you arrive at your destination. What are the Forks of the Credit if there is no Credit River flowing through? What is the trail through Belfountain's beautiful park if there is no body of water, a beautiful fountain and pretty little waterfall spanned by a bridge? Indeed, what impact will the lack of the protected species at risk (like Brook Trout) have on all the environment, the flora and fauna, and on both creatures and humans, populating the area not just here but also downstream? It's estimated the impact of the Votorantim pit will be felt for as many as 90 kilometres downstream. It's not even just Caledon that should be concerned but every community between here and Lake Ontario. For the record, we have only to look at the impact of climate change across the country to know that nature and people are firmly interconnected. If you think that's not the case, I invite you to reflect on our most recent summer of wildfires and read an article or two on the topic.

There are currently 11 active pits in Caledon, spread out over 3000+ acres of land (for context, that's just a little smaller than the entire town of Shelburne). These pits have already consumed much of our most arable farmland and this particular quarry will result in the loss of 700+ MORE acres, not to mention the loss of the forested areas also surrounding it. According to the group Forks of the Credit Preservation, 'Mature forests and productive farmland can never be put back into place after a quarry is depleted. The gravel removed when the site was cleared and which acts as a natural filtration system for groundwater can never be put back. Leaving a 'lake' behind means turning groundwater into surface water which is subjected to pollution and evaporation. True rehabilitation is simply not possible.' Even if it was, you might also be interested to know that 'aggregate licenses do not have an end date. Efforts to rehabilitate are not completed until aggregate extraction is deemed by the aggregate company to have ended.' I loosely translate this to mean 'until Votorantim decides it's made enough money from land exploitation.'

Maybe you are a commuter? Even if you are not, no doubt you find yourself on Highway 10 now and then. You will already know the highway is widely regarded as dangerous and that's due in no small part to the sheer volume of truck traffic. Five of the 11 pits run alongside the highway and the remaining six rely on Charleston Sideroad (Highway 24) in order to access Highway 10 for north and southbound travel. Caledon Village is squarely in the crosshairs. Alton, Cataract and commuters from the outer edges of Caledon, Orangeville, Shelburne and into Erin are all at risk from these big rigs and let's face it, so too are the folks trying to get to and from Southfields and into or out of Valleywood. Whatever you think of the disastrous driving conditions now, multiply that by

untold numbers as an estimated average of 298 trucks per hour (PER HOUR!) might pass through the intersection. That's fully loaded gravel trucks that will legally be allowed to haul from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., six days a week with the added possibility of ?limited? operational hours overnight, from 7 p.m. ? 6 a.m.

I'm barely scratching the surface here. The impact is already enormous and gaping ?moonscapes? already dot the ?landscape? of Caledon once known as the Greenest Town in Ontario. The true impact of yet another pit or quarry is almost beyond measuring. Blasting below the water table; potentially ensuring every well in Cataract will run dry, pumping millions of litres of discharge water into the Credit River system impacting all species including those at risk, and the increased dangers of almost 300 trucks an hour barrelling down Highway 10 at breakneck speeds are just some of the issues happening now or coming soon. There can be absolutely no doubt that the negative impacts to Caledon, and its residents, will last?forever.

Let your voice be heard. Call, write, sign the petition, join a group like the FCPG or put up a lawn sign. If you need help with how to word your concerns, sample letters are available on the FCPG website. Let the Town of Caledon know how you feel because if not you now - when?