**BANK SWALLOWS in Pits & Quarries**

**Guidance for Aggregate Producers**

*With habitats around the world, the Bank Swallow population in Canada is in decline, with an estimated drop of over 95 per cent since 1970 in Ontario alone. While the exact reason for this decline is unknown, loss of nesting sites and young broods as a result of habitat destruction/disturbance has been cited as a possible reason.*

**BACKGROUND:**

The Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), can nest in colonies from three to about 2,000 burrows and average about 70 burrows. Sand and gravel pits often provide suitable habitats for Bank Swallow colonies and have become important nesting sites for this species.

The Bank Swallow eats flying insects and spends the winter in South America. It returns to Canada between late April and May to breed. Burrow numbers generally continue to increase until mid-to-late June and colonies often remain active until mid-August.

**BANK SWALLOWS IN PITS & QUARRIES**

- Bank Swallows are attracted to pits and quarries. They build nests in stockpiled product or banks and they prefer sand or silty sand.
- Breeding season is early May to mid-August in southern Ontario and late-May to mid-August north of Sudbury.
- Excavation or construction during the spring and summer can negatively affect Bank Swallows or their nesting sites (Environment Canada, 2011).
- These birds will take advantage of stockpiled product and small banks up to large extraction faces offering suitable habitat within a pit, which has the potential to reduce operational access to these areas during the breeding season.

**YOUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY**

On June 27, 2014 the Bank Swallow was listed as Threatened on the Species at Risk in Ontario List and receives species and general habitat protection under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. Activities that impact Bank Swallows and their habitat can be registered online under the pits and quarries provision (section 23.14 of O. Reg 242/08). The provision allows activities to occur provided rules and conditions are followed and reasonable steps are taken to minimize the adverse effects of extraction on the species. The provision also requires the preparation of a mitigation plan which must identify steps to avoid or minimize killing, harming or harassing during a time of year when the species is likely to be carrying out a life process related to hibernation or reproduction.

In July 2015, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry released a General Habitat Description (GHD) for the Bank Swallow, please review it for more specific details on compatible and incompatible activities in Bank Swallow habitat. A copy of the GHD can be found on the OSSGA website at [www.ossga.com/ghd_bankswallow](http://www.ossga.com/ghd_bankswallow).

Bank Swallows and their nests are also protected under the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*. It is an offence for anyone to kill, hunt, capture, injure, harass, take or disturb a migratory bird nest or eggs. Offenders are liable to a fine or imprisonment.

**DATE:** October 1, 2015
FACT SHEET — BANK SWALLows (Riparia riparia)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

• Consult the General Habitat Description for the Bank Swallow (Riparia riparia) (MNRF, July 2015) for greater clarity on the area of habitat protected.
• Pre-plan in March to late April (or mid-May north of Sudbury) by altering working faces and stockpiles to prevent harassment or harm to Bank Swallows. Manage these areas throughout the breeding season to make these potential nesting sites unattractive.
• Provide alternate nesting sites in an inactive portion of your pit or quarry.

HOW TO CREATE & PROTECT HABITAT

✓ DO set aside pre-existing suitable habitat or create new habitat in inactive area(s) of a pit or quarry before the breeding season begins by creating vertical faces of 70 degrees or more in piles or banks. These areas should be off-limits to excavation for the duration of the breeding season from May - August. Heavy machinery near colonies is likely to disturb the swallows and reduce nesting productivity.

✓ DO protect nesting sites by cordon off these areas. Inform all pit employees of the location and ensure they know to avoid disturbing the area until further notice. This will help conserve active colonies. (Using sand piles, or pylons with or without police tape, are easy and effective ways to cordon off nesting sites.)

HOW TO DISCOURAGE BANK SWALLows FROM NESTING

✓ DO discourage Bank Swallows from nesting in areas that will be excavated over the breeding season by contouring faces to have a less vertical slope (either by sloping off or piling material on the face to create a slope that is less than 70°). Vertical faces located high up on a slope may have to be altered from above if possible, or extraction in these areas should be scheduled for after mid-August when the birds have left.

✓ DO install bird deterrent devices before breeding season starts, such as plastic owls (Great Horned Owls), to discourage Bank Swallows from establishing a colony in suitable banks.

✗ DON’T use deterrent devices (e.g. plastic owl) once a colony has been established since this could interfere with the Bank Swallow’s ongoing nesting activities.

OTHER GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

✓ DO secure access to your stockpiled material throughout the season by ensuring no vertical faces remain in the stockpile. (Slopes less than 70 degrees will prevent birds from nesting.)

✓ DO extract material ahead of the breeding season and create suitable habitat in the process by creating vertical faces greater than 70 degrees.

✓ DO devote a few minutes to removing vertical faces at the end of the work day so that Bank Swallows don’t begin to build in these faces overnight or over a weekend.

✓ DO carry out activities at an appropriate distance away from a colony, such as operating heavy machinery or excavating material. Operating too close may constitute harming or harassing a colony for which the operator will be liable under the Endangered Species Act, 2007.

RESOURCES:

