

OpEd: Supporting our growing communities and building Ontario together

Most people have a general idea of what aggregates are, but their importance – the critical role they play in our daily lives – is often overlooked.

Stone, sand, and gravel are essential for construction.

Aggregates are used to build the foundations of our homes, the schools in which our children learn, and the offices and factories in which we make a living. They are also essential to building the roads that connect us and the transit systems that get us moving.

In a literal sense, aggregates are the foundations of civic life.

Without them, the infrastructure we all depend upon could not be built. And our communities could not grow.

With the population in southern Ontario expected to grow by 4 million people by 2041, there is an increasing need for aggregates not only to maintain our infrastructure but to support the growth of our communities. That is the main driver behind our government's proposed changes to the way aggregates are managed in Ontario.

Recently, some concerns have been expressed about our proposal and I'd like to set the record straight on some of the key changes set out in the proposed *Better for People, Smarter for Business Act*.

The proposed changes to the *Aggregate Resources Act* (ARA) aim to reduce unnecessary administrative duplication and delays, creating opportunities for growth while maintaining a steadfast commitment to protecting the environment and managing impacts to communities.

A key change the government has proposed is to strengthen the protection of water resources through a more rigorous application process for requests from existing sites to extract aggregates below the water table. Currently, the government considers comments and decides whether to approve any below-water extraction on existing sites. Under the current process, there is no opportunity for others to ask for a hearing by a third party. The proposed change would allow municipalities and others to officially object to this kind of application and have their concerns heard by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

The policies of provincial land use plans and the Provincial Policy Statement recognize the importance of both aggregate resources and prime agricultural areas to the people of Ontario. It is important to note that impacts to prime agricultural areas must still be

considered during the approval process for aggregate extraction. Our government is not proposing any changes to that.

The province is also committed to protecting the Greenbelt, recognizing the critical importance of this area to farming communities. Outside of the Greenbelt, the Provincial Policy Statement recognizes that the wise use and management of agricultural lands and resources over the long term is a key provincial interest.

MNRF will continue to work closely and consult with industry, municipalities, other stakeholders and Indigenous communities on proposed changes to the management of aggregates in Ontario. We are committed to supporting development that is beneficial to our communities while maintaining our commitment to managing potential impacts from aggregate extraction.

Hon. John Yakabuski
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry