



Canadian Environmental Law Association
L'Association canadienne du droit de l'environnement

suite 303, one Spadina Crescent, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2J5 telephone (416) 978-7156

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

ONTARIO MINING BILL AUTOCRATIC, ECOLOGISTS WRITE OWN LAW

Toronto--

A new Ontario mining bill is so stacked against the public and local government that the legislature should adopt a bill written by a coalition of environmental and citizen groups instead, charged the Canadian Environmental Law Association today.

The government bill, The Aggregates Act, 1979 is currently undergoing legislative hearings before a standing committee on resources development where it has come under heavy fire in recent weeks from citizens, municipal and regional governments, conservation authorities and environmental groups.

The purposes of the Act include: management of aggregates (gravel, sand or stone); control of pits and quarries within designated public and private lands; and rehabilitation of excavated areas.

Environmentalists and local governments have charged that the government bill:

- deprives them of the common law right to prosecute the Act's violators;
- weakens already poor environmental requirements;
- pays only lip-service to rehabilitation needs;
- eliminates local zoning controls where they conflict with the provincial bill; and
- concentrates enormous powers in the Minister of Natural Resources despite his failure to enforce the existing Act.

To assist the standing committee, CELA, the Foundation for Aggregate Studies and a number of other groups today presented the committee with a completely re-written version of the government bill to correct the above deficiencies as well as require public input into the setting of regulations before they become law; allow citizens to obtain injunctions where the law is being violated; and authorize public review of field inspection reports. "The purpose of these amendments," stated Joe Castrilli, research director for CELA, "is to ensure that the operators of pits and quarries, and not the public, bear the full environmental and social costs of extractive activities."

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Poorly undertaken extractive activity can result in: loss of valuable forest and farmland, including topsoil; noise, dust and wind erosion; lowering of water tables and domestic water wells; stream siltation; safety hazards, including drownings where pits remain unrehabilitated; damage to provincial parks, endangered species habitat, unique archeological and geological formations; and groundwater contamination, where the method of rehabilitation used is to fill the site with garbage.

For more information contact:

Joe Castrilli(CELA)
(416) 978-7156

or

Arlin Hackman(FAS)
(416) 964-2672