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NDACT calls for stakeholders to be included in Aggregate Summit

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The Ford Government's Summit on Aggregate Reform continues to cause concern for the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT.) John Yakabuski, Provincial Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, says his ?government wants to ?work with industry leaders,? to ?cut red tape? and ?tear down barriers.? The summit, which takes place somewhere in Caledon, March 29th, includes Aggregate Industry leaders, Municipal leaders, and Indigenous leaders. However, NDACT Chair Karren Wallace reports, that as of now, the location has not been disclosed nor have stakeholders been invited.

?NDACT is a stakeholder, why aren't we at the table?? asks Wallace. ?Any established organization that wishes to be at the table should be there. Invitations should have been sent to NDACT, Protection Mono, AWARE Simcoe, Gravel Watch, Hidden Quarry, and Wellington Water Watchers to name a few. Certainly, the Federation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Processors, Ontario's number one economic contributor to the overall economy (Source: Ontario Federation of Agriculture,) should be at the summit.?

In a February 20 press release, Ford's Minister of Natural Resources said, ?Our government is committed to creating the conditions that will help unleash the resource sector's potential.?

Examining the ?Untangling Red Tape? document by the Ontario Sand Stone and Gravel Association (OSSGA,) which the gravel association prepared for the summit, NDACT found many troubling suggestions which they say, ?introduce another threat to moraines, water protection and perhaps the Green Belt. The Green Belt is a government protected area of Ontario's farmland, forests, wetlands, and watersheds, that limits urban development and sprawl on environmentally sensitive land.

?Just as with the Ford government's introduction of Bill 66, and a view of reducing growth intensification targets in the Places to Grow Act, this summit would appear to be another assault on the Greenbelt by this government,? says Wallace. Proposals in Schedule 10 of Bill 66, entitled ?Open For Business,? would have permitted Municipalities to exclude requirements for public notice and exempt compliance with portions of the Clean Water Act, Greenbelt Act, the Planning Act, Lake Simcoe Protection Act, Great Lakes Protection Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, key sections of the Planning Act and other environmental legislation implemented over the last 30 years.? Approval of Schedule 10 would have been a huge enviromental step backwards for Ontario, but pressing public outcry resulted in its removal from Bill 66.

NDACT says the summit document ?Untangling Red Tape? is unbalanced and ?appears to serve to make the aggregate industry more profitable, not reducing red tape.? The Ontario Sand Stone and Gravel Association report includes recommendations to remove aggregate land use decisions from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC,) and even goes so far as to suggest the government reconsider the requirement for the NEC itself. It should be noted that one of the jobs of the NEC is to protect the Greenbelt.

Further to these troubling statements, the Ontario Sand Stone and Gravel Association suggests that various government agencies, Conservation Authorities and Municipalities have ?broadened their role in commenting and ultimately ?approving' reports, applications and Site Plans as part of the The Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) and The Planning Act application review process? and that ?the call for third-party reviewers has exacerbated this problem.? This ?problem? for the aggregate industry comes in the form of delays, restrictions, or denials of new aggregate applications, usually due to enviromental concerns.

But, NDACT says, ?Without the involvment of agencies like the Grand River Conservation Authority, the Province would not have seen the damning report that basically shut down the Mega Quarry.? These agencies are involved for a reason. To protect the environment and subsequently the people of Ontario. Yet, on page seven of ?Untangling Red Tape,? NDACT points out that the aggregate association suggests the Provincial Government ?Proclaim the ?Permit by Rule' introduced in the 2017 Aggregate Resources Act,? allowing for more routine approvals of aggregate proposals to be automatic upon submission.

At a time when protection of source water is crucial and non-rewable foodland is disappearing at an unsustainable rate of 150 acres

per day in Ontario, NDACT's reaction to the OSSGA's suggestion that approvals for aggregate extraction proposals be automatic...is simply... ?Are they serious?? Wallace says, ?Paving over more farmland for business parks and manufacturing, when there is an ample supply of available land now, does not make economic sense.?

A recent study by the Neptis Foundation shows that of the available land for housing and employment outside the existing urbanized area ?80% of land is still available to accommodate another 15 years' worth of growth to 2031 and possibly beyond.?

The Ontario Sand Stone and Gravel Association also suggests, on page six of their document, that the Province's growth will require ?3.84 billion tonnes? of aggregate for development (that's more than 100 million truck loads of aggregate.) ?Over how many years?? asks the NDACT Chair. She says, ?A 2010 Ministry of Natural Resources report stated: ?Over the past 20 years, Ontario has consumed over three billion tonnes of aggregate,? meaning Ontario only uses ?about 184 million tonnes of aggregate a year.?

Shockingly, Wallace says, ?The ?Untangling Red Tape' report also suggests there is no need to protect the habitat of species at risk because the species may be harmed by factors other than a loss of habitat.? Among the reasons for the urgent call for more gravel by the OSSGA is ?the manufacturing of everything from paper and paint to chewing gum and household cleaners.?

Ms. Wallace stresses that NDACT is not against aggregate, ?We understand aggregates are the raw materials that help build our schools, hospitals and bridges. However, with a mandate to protect farmland and source water for Ontarians, the Chair of NDACT believes, ?The worId could certainly live without aggregate in our chewing gum and household cleaners.?

To view the OSSGA's summit document ?Untangling Red Tape: Helping Make Ontario Open For Business? visit: www.ossga.com/aggregate_summit_information. NDACT's ?Call to Action? is to support the Wellington Water Watchers' petition asking Minister John Yakabuski to open the Aggregate Summit to all stakeholders, not just the aggregate companies.