

STOP THE QUARRY

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How Three Community Groups Did It

By Dan O'Reilly
Photos by Mike Davis

Judging by the outcome of three high-profile campaigns against quarry proposals on or very near the Niagara Escarpment, citizen groups can prevail over seemingly insurmountable odds.

▲ North Dufferin Agriculture and Community Taskforce (NDACT) had these signs posted by countless supporters.

An example is The Coalition of Concerned Citizens' 13-year fight against the proposed James Dick 80-acre Rockfort Quarry which would have abutted the Escarpment. In November 2010 the Ontario Municipal Board ruled against the quarry.

Then, in October 2012, Protecting Escarpment Rural Lands and its community defence partner, Environmental Defence scored a decisive victory against Nelson Aggregate Co.'s 26 million-tonne quarry expansion plans on Mount Nemo when the Joint Board of the Ontario Municipal Board and the Environmental Review Tribunal ruled against its application for a Niagara Escarpment Plan Amendment.

A month later the Highland Companies announced it was withdrawing its application for a 2,316-acre 200-foot below-the-water-table open-pit limestone quarry in Melancthon Township after facing a fire storm of opposition spearheaded by the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT).

The three organizations were not connected and used different strategies. But there are threads which link them symbolically.

In interviews, spokespersons for each emphasized they stayed focused, utilized the different skills of volunteers, and acted professionally in dealing with both their adversaries and members.

"We were always respectful. There was no place for egos," says NDACT Chair Carl Cosack.

A public meeting held in January 2009 to raise the alarm about Highland's intentions led to the birth of NDACT and a board of directors. As the board became more formalized, potential new members were asked to submit a resumé

outlining their reasons for wanting to join. Each director was responsible for a certain set of tasks. Items were dealt with at regular monthly board meetings, but if a vote or discussion was required on an urgent issue that was done by conference calls and emails.

“We elevated the facts so there was a common understanding of the (environmental) issues,” says Cosack, crediting the efforts of chef Michael Stadtländer, the Canadian Chefs’ Congress and hundreds of other volunteers in generating public awareness of Highland’s plans via the highly successful 2011 Foodstock fundraiser and a similar Soupstock in 2012.

In an overview of its struggle against the Rockfort Quarry, Coalition director Lorraine

The Niagara Escarpment: It’s like having the Serengeti Plain in your backyard.

Symmes says there was a realization that “a professional approach” which included fully researching issues and carefully preparing oral and written submissions to government and quasi-judicial agencies, was crucial.

“They (agencies) will listen to you. But you have to be prepared.” A sense of humour was also helpful. “Penny provided that,” says Symmes, referring to Penny Richardson, the president of the Coalition since its inception in 1997.

Like any group, the Coalition was comprised of a diverse range of individuals who didn’t always agree. Maintaining a



▲ Singer-songwriter Sarah Harmer next to a poster of the Mount Nemo Declaration with signatures gathered at a fund-raising event in Burlington in 2009.

Rockfort Quarry

The Coalition of Concerned Citizens waged a determined battle against James Dick Construction's plans for an 80-acre, open pit dolostone mine at Winston Churchill and Old Baseline roads in the Town of Caledon. As the quarry would have involved mineral extraction up to 100 feet below the water table, it was concerned about the threat to watershed, plus the impacts on roadways, the Niagara Escarpment ecosystem and a local moraine. In November 2010 the Ontario Municipal Board ruled against the application. In its ruling the board said the "natural heritage and cultural heritage recourses" of the subject lands outweighed their aggregate importance.

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Mount Nemo

An application to the Niagara Escarpment Commission by Nelson Aggregate Co. to expand its existing quarry on Mount Nemo in north Burlington was opposed by Protecting Escarpment Rural Lands and its community defence partner Environmental Defence on the grounds it would endanger native species, wetland health and groundwater supply. In October 2012 the Joint Board ruled against the application, in part, because the quarry would threaten the habitat of the Jefferson Salamander.

Melancthon Township mega-quarry

In November 2012, faced with a storm of protest spearheaded by the North Dufferin Agricultural Community Task Force, the Highland Companies announced it was withdrawing its application for a 2,316- acre 200- foot below-the-water-table open pit limestone quarry. Local residents and urban dwellers alike were worried about the quarry's size, location, potential detrimental impact on the headwaters of several significant rivers, and the loss of farmland.

sense of humour helped to diffuse often heated arguments, explains Richardson. "We had to compromise, persevere, and listen to opinions. It wasn't just about one person. Numerous people were involved," says Richardson, citing the

Coalition's board of directors, a group which met every Sunday to deal with ongoing issues, and a 150-strong contingent who organized highly successful yearly garage sales which helped defray legal costs and consultant studies.

"There was no magic bullet," she says, in explaining how the Coalition prevailed. "It was contingent on a lot of things, hiring good legal counsel and scientific experts, good fund raising, and finding people willing to work hard

and stay the course."

When asked what lessons PERL learned which could be emulated by other Escarpment-based citizen bodies, executive director Roger Goulet says

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▲ In 2011, Foodstock raised awareness and funds for NDACT's cause.



▲ The Coalition of Concerned Citizens became famous for their enormous annual garage sale that filled a riding arena with donated goodies that funded their legal challenge.

decisions and actions should be guided by scientific research.

“Use technical experts to identify and record the ecological and hydrogeological science for the area. A key factor to PERL’s success was its legal team’s insistence on getting all the relevant evidence before the Joint Board.”

Formed in 2005, PERL maintained morale by attracting people committed to a common vision, keeping them involved, and incorporating fun into its strategies. The most obvious example was singer Sarah

Harmer’s series of Escarpment fund-raising concerts.

“Absolutely. Sarah is amazing. The concerts generated a huge amount of energy, goodwill and public awareness,” says Goulet, when asked if celebrities can help citizen campaigns. “PERL and many other NGOs are striving for the protection of our natural areas and prime agricultural lands, both in scarce supply. We hope that the Niagara Escarpment and the Greenbelt will finally receive true protection from ecologically non-sustainable development.”



The Coalition's Penny Richardson also believes there is now heightened public and political will to protect the Escarpment. "It's like having the Serengeti Plain in your backyard."

The counsel for Environment Defence is a little more guarded. Of the three development proposals, only the Mount Nemo lands are specifically on the Escarpment and in the summer of 2012 the Joint Board approved Walker Aggregates' application for a 42-million tonne quarry on the highest point of the Niagara Escarpment

near Duntroon, says David Donnelly.

"I'm not sure the political landscape has changed. The Niagara Escarpment Plan does not protect the entire Escarpment, only a portion of it. It (the plan) is sorely out of date and in need of a thorough review and updating." **NEV**

Dan O'Reilly is a frequent contributor to Niagara Escarpment Views. His last article was "Energy-Efficiency at Black Bank Hill" in Winter 2012.

For a related feature, see "Singing for the Escarpment" by Linda Lee, Escarpment Views, December 2008.