


An aerial photograph showing a large gravel pit on the right side of the image, with a dirt road running alongside it. The left side of the image is dominated by a dense forest of green trees. In the background, a body of water is visible under a clear blue sky.

Working Together to Limit the Impact of Gravel Operations

BY DAN O'REILLY

An aerial photograph showing a large-scale gravel quarry operation. In the foreground, a white house with a grey roof sits on a green lawn, partially encroached by a dirt road and gravel piles. To the right of the house, several yellow and orange construction vehicles, including trucks and excavators, are parked on a gravel area. The middle ground is dominated by a vast, flat expanse of light-colored gravel and sand, with several small, irregular ponds of blue water scattered throughout. In the background, a dense line of green trees marks the edge of the quarry, beyond which a hazy horizon is visible under a clear blue sky.

United We Stand might be considered the motto of the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition (RGMC), an incorporated non-profit body comprised of 20 Ontario grassroots groups established in 2022 to limit the environmental and social impact of gravel operations.

The hard reality of Nelson Aggregate's lunar landscape encroaching on the living green of Burlington's Escarpment.
DRONE PHOTO BY TODD JARRETT

Twelve of the groups forming RGMCC are extremely active and its members sit on a steering committee which meets virtually every two weeks and in person every three months, says campaign director Mike Balkwill.

The catalyst for its formation was a litany of gravel-related complaints from citizen groups that Mike was receiving when he was with the Wellington Water Watchers. While the common thread was the impact of gravel operations, “each group was fighting their own fight.” The coalition connects those groups to legal and technical experts, helps them prepare for Ontario Land Tribunal hearings, and advocates for regulatory and legislative reforms. A key initiative is calling for a moratorium on new gravel mining approvals. That’s not an unreasonable demand, says Mike.

More Licences Than Needed

“Ontario licenses 13 times more gravel for extraction than the amount it consumes each year,” says Mike, citing data which shows Ontario’s 6,000 pits and quarries are licensed to mine two billion tonnes of gravel annually, yet only extract between 160 to 170 million tonnes annually.

“In Halton Region alone there are 22 licensed pits and quarries,” says Gord Pinard, president of Conserving Our Rural Ecosystems of Burlington (CORE Burlington).

Along with Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL), the City of Burlington and Halton Region, CORE is fighting Nelson Aggregates’ proposed expansion of its limestone quarry on Mount Nemo. The proposal is to



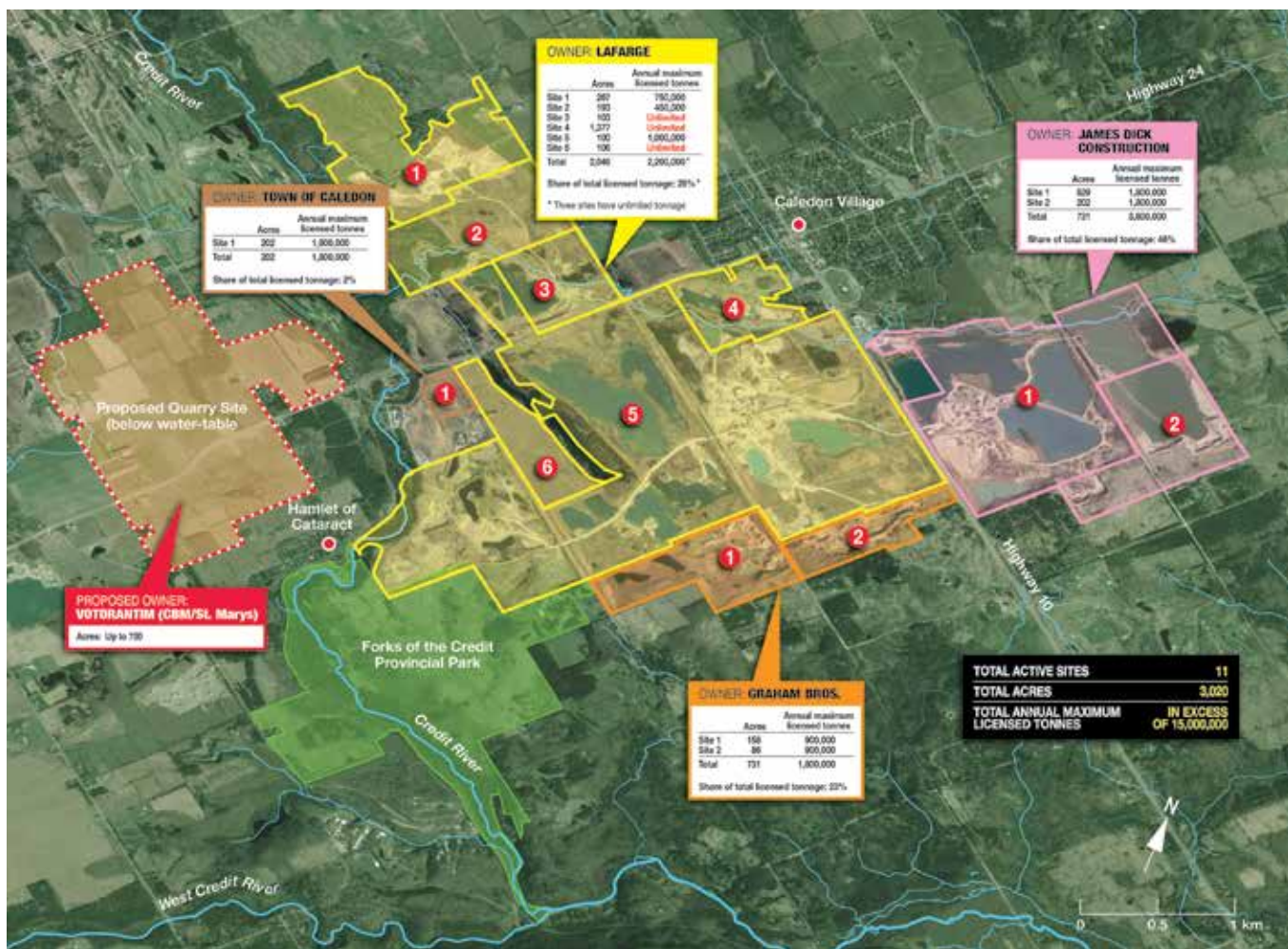
▲ The rugged beauty of Mount Nemo’s ancient limestone cliffs thrills hikers, photographers and rock-climbers.
PHOTO BY DEAN CAHUSAC

create two new quarries, a 45.2-acre one south of the existing quarry and a 148.3-acre one to the west. A joint city/region/Niagara Escarpment Commission technical analysis of the proposal had been underway. But in 2023 Nelson “prematurely abandoned” that process, says Gord, and filed an appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal. That appeal

was the focus of a hearing from March to June of this year. Closing submissions were to be presented by the various parties in early September. A decision date is not known, says Gord.

This is Nelson’s second attempt at expanding the quarry. In 2012, after an eight-year fight the Joint Board (Ontario Municipal Board + Environmental Review

Tribunal) unanimously denied the application, primarily because of the unmitigated threat to the endangered Jefferson Salamander. But most of the same concerns about noise, threats to the groundwater aquifer, impact on natural heritage systems and the impact on the surrounding communities are still relevant, says Gord. “Gravel fights are very



▲ Using satellite imagery and other map-making technology, Reform Gravel Mining Coalition produced this map for Forks of the Credit Preservation Group (FC Preservation). It shows CBM Aggregates' proposed quarry site along with 11 other quarry sites in the immediate area of northwest Caledon. PHOTO PROVIDED.



▲ Burlington's beautiful Mount Nemo is protected within the Niagara Escarpment UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. PHOTO BY GORD PINARD



▲ The breathtaking destination is worth every step on the rugged path to Burlington's Medad Valley. PHOTO BY GORD PINARD

emotional issues, but they're also very technical issues which can be quite daunting for citizens' groups," adds Gord.

Being a member of the RGMC links those groups and facilitates knowledge sharing, says Gord. As an example, he cites CORE's research on blasting-related flyrock. That's the term used to describe rocks propelled through the air by blasting operations.

Escarpment Quarry Battles

The Mount Nemo quarry battle is one of a number along the Niagara Escarpment that coalition members are waging. In northwest Caledon, the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group (FC Preservation) is locked in a bitter struggle against CBM Aggregates, a division of Brazilian conglomerate Votorantim Cimentos, which plans to blast an 80-foot-below-

Fall paints glorious colours across the Carolinian forests that thrive on the Escarpment in Burlington. PHOTO BY JANET TURPIN MYERS





A solitary hiker enjoys a golden patch of Carolinian forest on Burlington's Escarpment. PHOTO BY JANET TURPIN MYERS



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the-water quarry on approximately 700 acres of prime agricultural land adjacent to the Credit River in the area.

Issues of concern include air quality, noise, gravel truck traffic, the estimated loss of 40,000 trees, the impact on the river, and the possible drying out of private wells from dewatering, says David Sylvester, chair of FC Preservation.

It is very much a David-versus-Goliath battle, he concedes. But in March of this year FC Preservation secured a major victory when the Ontario Land Tribunal dismissed CBM Aggregates' appeal of the Town of Caledon's Interim Control Bylaw against new pits and quarries. It was implemented for a one-year term in 2022, and renewed for a second one-year term in 2023, after a FC Preservation-commissioned planning consultant's report revealed that Caledon's aggregate policies were the weakest of Ontario's top 10 municipal gravel producers.

CBM Aggregates had submitted applications to both the town and Ministry of Natural Resources before new, strengthened policies were enacted in October 2024. Had the appeal been successful, CBM's application would have been "grandfathered" and assessed under the old policies, says David. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has not signed on the new policies, for some unknown reason, he says.

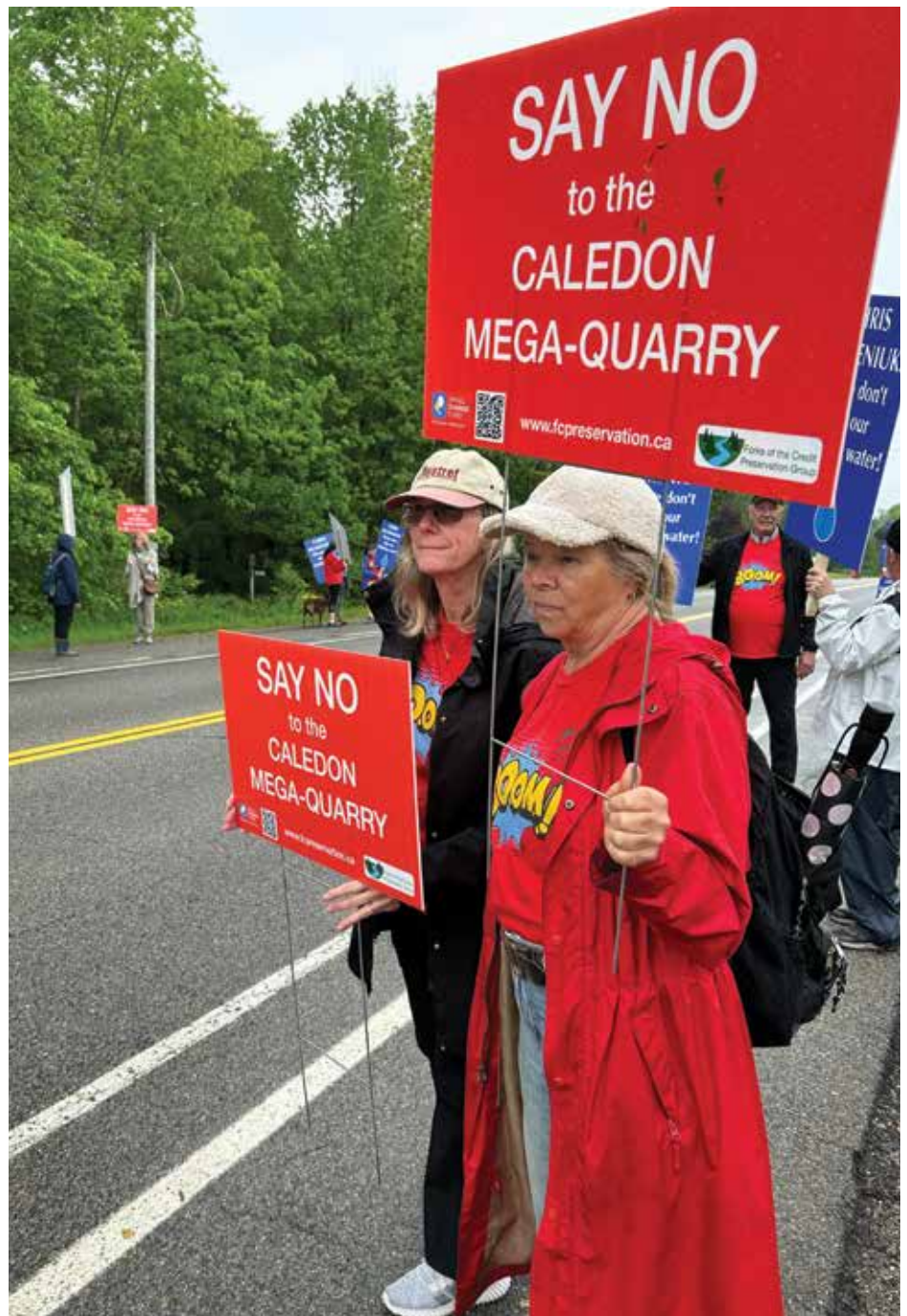
Another opposition strategy was the creation of an "easy-to-interpret" map showing the proposed quarry along with 11 active sites in the immediate area. The coalition produced it using satellite imagery and other map-making technology, while David conducted the research. "We have used the map at a number of meetings," he says.

Further to the north in Melancthon Township is a new quarry struggle. Earlier this year locally-based Strada Aggregate filed an application with the Ministry of Natural Resources for a blasting quarry on a 350-acre property it owns.

"It would be the first blasting quarry in Dufferin County. The crater [of the mine] would be 250 feet below the ground surface," says Larry Taman, organizer of Melancthon Against Quarries.

Potential Impacts

Residents' opposition is based on the potential impacts to air quality, natural



▲ About 40 members and supporters of the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group protested at the June 6 opening of the RBC Canadian Open at Osprey Valley Golf Course in northwest Caledon. They weren't opposing the tournament, they object to the golf course's partnership with CBM Aggregates to develop an 80-foot-below the water blasting quarry, more than half of which would be on golf course lands.

PHOTO BY DAN O'REILLY

environment, endangered species, water-table damage and truck traffic. In this battle Reform Gravel Mining Coalition has been helpful in getting the Melancthon group organized. But Larry is worried about the looming implications of Ontario's Bill 5, a section of which would allow the Premier and the cabinet to designate Special Economic Zones and select "trusted proponents" who would be given the authority to undertake projects without regard to provincial and municipal laws and bylaws.

There is a very real risk that proposed quarry sites could be declared Special Economic Zones, says the coalition's Mike Balkwill. That is why it is incumbent for citizens groups "to write their MPPs and demand that Bill 5 be withdrawn." **NEV**

Dan O'Reilly's last feature for this magazine was "Concerns for the Greenbelt Remain," Autumn 2024. All past features can be read online under Magazine>Back Issues at NEViews.ca.



▲ Trees in Mount Nemo Conservation Area snake their way to the top of the canopy in search of the sun. PHOTO BY DEAN CAHUSAC



▲ Protesters are deeply disappointed that Chris Humeniuk, owner of Osprey Valley Golf Course in northwest Caledon, is willing to accept discharged water from a CBM Aggregates' blasting quarry onto his golf course. PHOTO BY DAN O'REILLY



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