

Accessing Close-to-Market Sources for Aggregates

The Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association is facing hard issues while working with government, stakeholders – and the public.

By Treena Hein

The Ontario Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (OSGA) is busy these days, working for change. There are a variety of thorny issues being faced by the aggregate industry in that province, likely similar to those in other provinces – but in Ontario, they're somewhat magnified. "The aggregate industry nationally is having more interactions than ever with the public in terms of people's concerns and input, but Ontario in particular has many vocal citizens and a very high population density," says OSSGA President Moreen Miller. "It makes things particularly challenging and creates some complex dynamics between the people, governments and industry."

Chief among the issues is the existence of various barriers in licensing new reserves.

"Ontario consumes an average of 160 million tonnes of aggregates per year, and close-to-market sources are rapidly depleting," says Miller. "We've been consuming our licensed supply of stone, sand and gravel 2.5 times faster than we're licensing new reserves for future production."

She says in the Greater Toronto Area, there is at present only a ten-year supply of high-quality limestone licensed, for example. "The Ontario government's decision to allow 25% population growth by 2021 will create the need for a corresponding production increase of 25% (40 million tonnes of material) a year," says Miller.

There are strong efforts being made to continue to reduce per capita consumption of aggregates and use more recycled mate-

rial, but changes to provincial legislation to support these efforts are slow. "Many municipalities still do not allow recycled aggregates in their tenders on a regular basis, and believe it or not, it's also not uncommon to have municipalities object to aggregate product recycling as an accessory use in licensed pits and quarries," Miller notes. "This is quite astonishing, especially when the Ministry of Transportation has led the way so significantly over the past two decades to ensure that recycled products are used in every phase of provincial government construction projects."

Material Sourcing

Sourcing new material is also difficult because of land-use pressures. "The land close

SAROS Update

Over the past several years, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) has completed 'The State of the Aggregate Resource in Ontario Study' (SAROS). This province-wide assessment includes six reports on topics such as recycling, rehabilitation, consumption and demand. A total of 17 Advisory Committee recommendations on SAROS were released in 2010. (The ten-member committee includes Ontario Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (OSGA) president Moreen Miller, as well as leaders of municipalities and conservation groups such as Gravel Watch Ontario.) The recommendations cover a range of topics, including the creation and implementation

of a strategic roadmap, aggregate resource protection, environmental protection and stewardship, communication, information management and research.

One recommendation advises the identification of strategies that advance the application of the Three R's: reduce, reuse and recycle, as well as those that promote the use of innovative materials. "We had lively committee debates about how to do this," Miller notes. "It's a challenge because there are no viable economic alternatives to using virgin aggregates. But the SAROS reports do note that we've doubled our consumption of recycled aggregates and we're committed to doing more and being even more collaborative."

The government is currently considering the SAROS findings and Advisory Committee recommendations to decide what will be implemented. "As you can appreciate, there are many considerations that go into government decision-making, which would include cost...and impacts to stakeholders such as the aggregate industry and municipalities," says Pauline Desroches, manager at the OMNR Lands and Non-Renewable Resources Section (Natural Heritage, Lands and Protected Spaces Branch Policy Division). "The Minister committed at the Ontario Stone Sand and Gravel Association Annual General Meeting to release a response to SAROS."

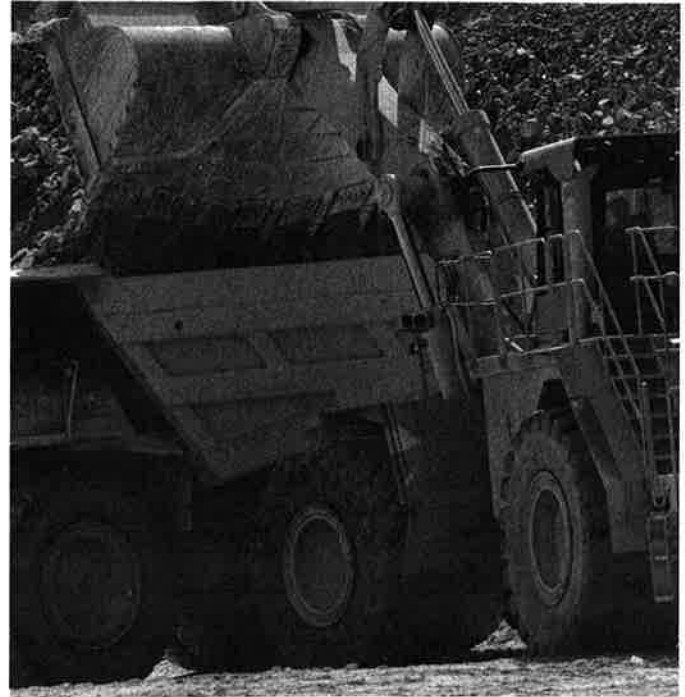
to areas that are experiencing population growth is in high demand for many different things,” observes Miller, “but that’s exactly where being able to extract remaining reserves is best environmentally.” Doing so, she asserts, reduces the number of trucks on the road, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and provides for possible future public use of former licensed lands in close proximity to urban areas. However, people in communities across the province aren’t convinced of that, Miller says, and they routinely object to nearby proposed quarry and pit developments.

“There also isn’t the view out there that OSSGA members contribute significantly to local communities,” she adds. “People aren’t aware that 60% of aggregate extraction is consumed by government for the roads they use every day. We are doing our best to educate the public.”

Across Ontario, Miller says there are hundreds of examples of how new landscapes created by aggregate extraction are so successfully integrated into local communities, that residents are often unaware that aggregate operations once existed there. “Indeed, we as an industry are challenged with articulating the number of sites that are rehabilitated because these sites are so integrated into the local landscape that they are difficult to locate,” says Miller.

OSSGA is trying to raise public awareness about the realities and benefits of aggregate projects through a website (www.theholestory.ca) and *Avenues* magazine, a new twice-yearly publication dedicated to discussion of resource management issues.

Miller acknowledges that while there has been innovative thinking demonstrated by some provincial ministries, at the same time during the last several years, the provincial government has



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made decisions that have increased the complexity of licensing processes. “We’ve received strong messages that close-to-market sources, despite being environmentally friendly and highly regulated, may not be supported by the province, despite existing policies that the industry believes supports these concepts,” Miller says. The OSSGA is leading several innovative studies looking at topics such as cumulative impacts, and long-term ecological diversity. “But we need the Ontario government’s support to fully embrace new ideas that give us flexibility and reward economic investment,” Miller says.

Long Rolls of Red Tape

In Ontario, the aggregate industry is covered under a staggering 25 pieces of provincial, municipal and federal legislation. Each piece has differing and sometimes duplicating processes, which has created a very complex regulatory environment, says Miller. It’s therefore challenging for multiple ministries to co-ordinate. “In some parts of Ontario, it’s not uncommon to invest more than five years in the licensing process for a new or expanded mineral aggregate operation,” she says. “This sort of regulatory environment also obviously makes it difficult for producers to ensure they’ve complied with everything – and for the public to understand how the process works, and what their role is in contributing to decisions.”

OSSGA members would like to see extensive streamlining of the licensing process, one that removes duplication and defines clear timeframes. “This would allow companies to make concrete financial plans,” says Miller. “A more clear and efficient permitting process will also support better enforcement, create confidence in the industry and ensure future investment in the sector.”

Many of the issues facing industry have been addressed in a response to an extensive Ministry of Natural Resources study (see SAROS sidebar on page 20). “We need more innovative action amongst the various stakeholders and it should be led by the province,” Miller concludes. “If the province leads in balancing non-renewable resource management, the aggregate industry is a committed and willing partner.” ■

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