



Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay

NEWSLETTER

Caring for the Lake Superior Coastline

April 2008

Proponent attempting to resolve objections to quarry licence application

On January 14, 2008, DST Consulting Engineers, who act as Agents on behalf of Superior Aggregates Company (SAC) responded to the letters of objections it received in November 2006 in relation to its quarry licence application. After waiting over a year to respond to these concerns, the Company asked the objectors to reply within 30 days. According to information gleaned from CCMB's *Freedom of Information* requests, it appears the delay was mainly attributed to government requests for additional information, time needed for the company to collect additional baseline information and to conduct additional testing. SAC was required to address these issues, which resulted in further modifications being made to their proposal.

CCMB and its team of professionals (an environmental lawyer, land use planner, acoustical engineer, hydro-geologist, and limnologist) reviewed SAC's letter and provided a reply covering a host of potential impacts. Each professional is now in the process of arranging to meet with SAC and DST consultants and government officials in their respective areas of expertise for the purpose of highlighting persistent issues of concern and to repudiate some of the company's claims and methodologies.

It is expected that SAC will likely be unable to resolve

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CCMB's concerns, which will likely result in the Minister of Natural Resources referring the licence application to the Ontario



Municipal Board (OMB) for resolution. Timing of the hearing is difficult to predict, but current estimates are that the hearing may take place in Fall 2008. The hearing will be conducted in Wawa, Ontario. Stay tuned to www.ccmb.ca for details.

CCMB in the press

CCMB thanks the Toronto *Globe & Mail* for permitting us to reprint the following article, which appeared in its February 16, 2008 edition. The article describes many of the issues surrounding the controversy with Superior Aggregates Company's proposal to establish a large coastal quarry at Michipicoten Bay.

NATURAL RESOURCES: STONE-COLD ECONOMY

Between a rock and a hard place

Times are tough in Northern Ontario. But is blasting the Lake Superior shoreline to produce gravel for Michigan highways really the answer?

CONOR MIHELL

February 16, 2008

WAWA, ONT. -- Randy Klockars fondly remembers the camaraderie of long winter nights when neighbours came together and celebrated the hardscrabble life they shared "on the Bay."

At his beachfront home on Lake Superior's Michipicoten Bay, near Wawa, Ont., friends would gather over potluck dinners to complain of overflowing septic tanks and epic snowfalls while food simmered on the woodstove and someone stoked the sauna. Toward midnight, crazed souls would escape the intense heat indoors and charge across the snow-covered beach for a quick dip in the lake.

It has been a few years now since Mr. Klockars, a high-school teacher, and his wife and six children have held such a party. With layoffs and shutdowns at area lumber mills, pickings have been slim for Wawa, a community of 3,500 just off the Trans-Canada Highway between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay. What's more, a proposed quarry and processing facility has opened a rift between those for and against an American company's promise of jobs that comes with potential environmental risks.

Superior Aggregates Company (SAC), a subsidiary of the Michigan-based highway-building giant Carlo Companies, is poised to start clearing vegetation on a 386-hectare site to within 60 metres of the Lake Superior shoreline in order to blast the underlying, 2.5-billion-year-old rock into high-grade gravel.

Poised to begin

The land was formerly owned by Algoma Steel, which shipped iron ore mined near Wawa to its mill in Sault Ste. Marie by freighter. In 1999, a year after Algoma ceased operations in Wawa, SAC purchased the property for \$725,000 (U.S.). It contains trap rock, which is far more valuable to road builders than the typical crushed limestone aggregates from the Niagara Escarpment. Furthermore, the company could cut costs significantly by shipping the aggregate from an existing 455-metre long wharf.

After waiting almost a decade for proper approvals, SAC could begin operations as early as next year, says project manager Harold Cheley, of DST Consulting Engineers, the company that has been contracted to develop the quarry.

SAC will remove up to 23,000 tonnes of material a week, he says, and provide permanent seasonal jobs to about a dozen people during the first phase of operation, which will last five to 10 years. Profits generated during this phase will be used to upgrade the wharf and research the feasibility of expanding operations, Mr. Cheley says.

Wawa resident Richard Watson has been outspoken in his support for the quarry. "It's really frustrating when there's a great opportunity here for a town that's

hurting," he says. "I wonder how many millions of dollars in taxes have we lost already because of a few people who know how government works and have caused delays."

In 2004, SAC applied to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to develop a quarry, but it was determined that the groundwater elevation was closer to the surface than was previously thought. SAC then reapplied for a permit to quarry beneath the water table.

Now, "the concerns of government agencies have been dealt with and we're responding to objections from the public," Mr. Cheley says. "The community needs something energetic and new to start up," he adds. "I'd say 98 per cent of the population supports it."

Joel Cooper, a member of the Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay, a group of full-time and seasonal residents who have been "caring for the coast" since 2002, would beg to differ. "We may be in the minority," Mr. Cooper says, "but we're the ones looking out for the best interest of Lake Superior."

Among those supporting the group's position are environmental advocacy organizations such as Gravel Watch Ontario, Environmental Defence Canada and Freshwater Future, based in Michigan, he says.

Mr. Cooper's humble year-round home of 25 years looks out across Michipicoten Bay. It is separated from SAC's property by two kilometres of Canadian Shield and the boreal forest immortalized by Group of Seven painter A.Y. Jackson, who once kept a summer cabin next door.

A 'foot in the door'

All his group wants, he says, is to ensure that the area's clean water and air continue to provide habitat for fish and wildlife, and remain attractive to residents and tourists alike. The noise of pit quarrying, the risk of water contamination due to dust and leaching, and the visual impact of stripping the land and blasting the rock do not fit the group's vision.

Of most concern is the fact that, under existing legislation, SAC will need to assess the potential environmental effects only on the 10 per cent of its land that it has applied for a licence to quarry. Yet if it plans to be in operation over the long haul, Mr. Cooper says, it will have to apply to expand its area of operations within five years. "It's a 'foot-in-the-door' strategy where the hope is future approvals won't come with the same degree of scrutiny," he says. "We'd rather examine the long-term, cumulative impacts now, rather than in phases over the next 50 years."

In 2004, Mr. Cooper's group presented the Ontario Ministry of the Environment with 4,600 letters of support for an inspection under the provincial Environmental Assessment Act. Instead, the province extended the jurisdiction of the Aggregate Resources Act, which is managed by the Natural Resources Ministry and until then had encompassed only Southern Ontario; the act now includes the development at Michipicoten, but it is fundamentally different from the Environmental Assessment Act.

Brian Messerschmidt, manager of the Natural Resources Ministry's aggregate and petroleum resources section, says that to acquire a licence to quarry under the act, an applicant must provide a site plan and documents outlining land use, the type and amount of aggregate to be removed and rehabilitation plans, as well as technical reports dealing with environmental, cultural and hydrological considerations. These materials are then assessed by municipal, provincial and federal agencies. The applicant is also required to notify and consult the public and attempt to mediate any objections - the current stage of the SAC application.

"The act is sound, but it presumes that the MNR has exclusive control when other laws such as the Environmental Protection Act should apply as well," says Ric Holt of Gravel Watch Ontario. "The rules might make sense in some contexts, but it's not at all clear that they apply on the north shore of Lake Superior."

Mr. Cooper says the applicant-driven Aggregate Resources Act "isn't the appropriate piece of legislation" because it facilitates SAC's piecemeal approach to developing its property and is too narrow in its environmental scope. "They're only required to look at impacts within 120 metres of the proposed site," he says. "But the impact is going to go well beyond 120 metres, especially on Lake Superior."



Of greater environmental consequence is the fact that the proposed Wawa quarry could compromise the entire north shore of Lake Superior, says Brian Christie, executive director of the Lake Superior Conservancy and Watershed Council, a non-profit environmental advocacy group based in Sault Ste. Marie.

Michipicoten Bay sits in the middle of more than 300 kilometres of wilderness comprising the world's longest stretch of undeveloped freshwater coast. The area's lichen-draped forest and 200-metre-tall cliffs provide refuge for rare wildlife such as woodland caribou and peregrine falcons; plants commonly found in the Arctic attest to Lake Superior's glacially cold water. Many consider the lake water clean enough to drink straight from the source.

Conflicting visions

But, according to Mr. Christie, the province seems more interested in building quarries than protecting the area. And the looming SAC development could open the door for more. In 2001, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines commissioned a study that identified 15 other potential quarry sites on Lake Superior's north shore - including six bordering the newly designated Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area.

Since this federal marine park protects little of the shoreline, Mr. Christie says, smaller quarries could be developed to feed a large processing facility at Michipicoten, 250 kilometres to the south. He says that hawking the area to prospectors hardly jibes with the province's pledges to revive the Northern economy with tourism and promote the area as a world-class destination with already "bought-and-paid-for" initiatives such as the Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

That plan, which was drawn up in 1999 by the former Progressive Conservative government, was supposed to bring wilderness-seeking tourists and a management strategy to the north shore, not encourage an aggregate-producing stronghold, Mr. Christie says. "The Heritage Coast would've been well established by now," he says. "But for whatever reason the Liberals deep-sixed it. We're trying to encourage them to reopen the file and get on with it."

The situation at Michipicoten Bay resembles the standoff at Digby Neck, N.S., in 200, when a New Jersey-based road-building conglomerate proposed a quarry of similar proportions on the shore of the North Atlantic. That bid was snuffed out in November by the provincial Department of Environment and Labour because of "unacceptable risks to the environment and communities."

Desperate for jobs

In Nova Scotia, worry about the proposed quarry's threats to fisheries and a burgeoning tourism industry outweighed the promise of 20-odd jobs. But in Wawa, even a dozen new jobs from SAC is helpful after more than 130 full-time workers were left without employment in December when Weyerhaeuser - another company with stateside head offices - permanently closed the local pressboard mill. Those layoffs - along with hundreds of others in the

region's forest sector - were blamed on the stagnant American housing market, strong Canadian dollar and high energy costs. Wawa's population is dwindling as fast as its jobless rate skyrockets. Ryan Lamming is one local who will not be around for long. After losing his job with Weyerhaeuser, Mr. Lamming, 29, promptly pulled up his lifelong stakes in the area and by next week will be living in Dawson Creek, B.C., where he plans to make ends meet as a tradesman, with the eventual goal of becoming an officer with the RCMP.

He says he will let time decide whether he is for or against the proposed quarry. "The area needs something, especially now," he says. "But I'm 100 per cent against anything that will make a massacre of the shoreline."

Quarry or no quarry, Randy Klockars says he will continue to fire up the sauna on Saturday nights at his home on Michipicoten Bay. The parties might not be as boisterous as they once were, but everyone is invited to enjoy the sounds of the lake.

Thanking our supporters!

Again, we probably don't say it enough, but the support that has been directed toward CCMB has been most heart-warming. Our message has seemed to galvanize those who have experienced the truly unique qualities of Lake Superior and developed their own special connection to its magnificent waters, expansive beaches, rugged coastline, and spacious shoreline forests.

Over the past year, CCMB has received particularly generous support from the following organizations:

- Freshwater Future (formerly Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Network Fund)
- Mountain Equipment Co-op
- The McLean Foundation

- The EJLB Foundation

Special thanks also goes to Environmental Defence, who handles the charitable tax receipts on our behalf.

Thanks also to all of you who contributed in one way or another - by donating your money, time, and talents. Every contribution - large and small - is truly appreciated!

Who we are.....

The Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay (CCMB) are a group of inhabitants on Michipicoten Bay; residents in the Wawa/northeastern Lake Superior



area; and supporters across Ontario, Canada, the United States of America and elsewhere throughout the world.

We care about what happens to the coastline of northeastern Lake Superior.

We know Lake Superior. Our members have paddled around the whole lake; paddled and boated along the shore and amongst the islands of northeastern Lake Superior; surveyed and researched the natural features and human history of the area.

The current threat to our area is a proposed traprock quarry at the west end of Michipicoten Bay. We are concerned with the future of the Michipicoten Bay. We are also concerned with northeastern Lake Superior (from Pukaskwa National Park south through to Lake Superior Provincial Park), the longest stretch of wilderness shoreline of all the Great Lakes.



Please visit our website at
www.ccmb.ca