

May 1, 2019

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Submission on Aggregate Reform  
PDF via e-mail [aggreatereform@ontario.ca](mailto:aggreatereform@ontario.ca)



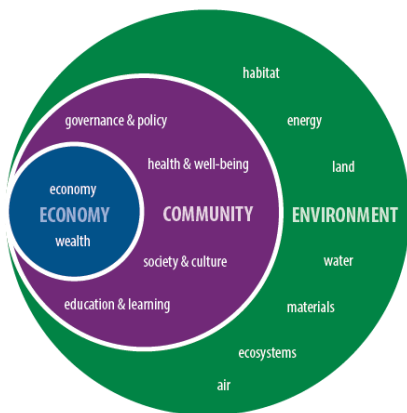
**Introduction:**

BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association has been the solution-focused voice for the environment in Burlington for the past 11 years. To date, we have advocated on more than 100 environmental issues including those of quarry expansions in our municipality. Through awareness, advocacy, and action, we collaborate with the community to protect the environment, mitigate climate change and to create a healthier, more environmentally responsible Burlington.

We provide input at the provincial level on issues that have both province-wide and local impact. Burlington has two quarries – Nelson Aggregate and Meridian Brick – within its municipal boundaries, and we therefore wish to comment on Ontario’s efforts to create an environment for growth and a sustainable aggregate resource sector, both from the point of view of the perspective afforded us by our local experience, but also from a broader perspective in the context of today’s significant environmental challenges.

**BurlingtonGreen’s Position:**

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing Ontarians. To achieve progress on climate action, climate change mitigation must drive all government decision-making. This calls for a complete transformation of the current decision-making framework, placing climate action as a top priority. A shift from the traditional framework to one that prioritizes our impact on the environment is critical. A nested circle framework recognizes that social and economic activity occurs **within** ecological limits.



*Photo credit: Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan*

BurlingtonGreen recognizes the contribution of the aggregate sector to Ontario’s economy and understands the need to ensure this industry is able to meet the needs of the construction sector that is responsible for building and maintaining our roads, schools, hospitals, commercial and industrial structures and residences; in short, much of the physical infrastructure on which our society depends.

At the same time, we are facing serious climate realities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [latest report](#) issued in 2018 recommends keeping global warming to maximum of 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels. This calls for a greenhouse gas emissions reductions target of about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. Because extraction operations often threaten forestlands and woodlots which are natural carbon sinks, while also adding to GHG emissions, it is crucial that tree canopy conservation and replacement be paramount in considering approval for new or expanded aggregate projects, and that protection afforded by other legislation, such as the Green Belt Plan and other such acts be honoured.

Another critical ecological issue we are currently facing is what scientists have termed a sixth mass extinction of plants and animals on Earth. But unlike past extinctions, this one is being caused by human activity. According to the [Centre for Biological Diversity](#), “as many as 30 to 50 percent of all species are possibly heading toward extinction by mid-century”, and since “most of biodiversity's benefits take place at a local level, conserving local populations is the only way to ensure genetic diversity critical for a species' long-term survival”. This means that wherever we are thinking of introducing human activity, such as a quarry or mining operation, it is vital that a comprehensive environmental impact assessment be completed to determine whether any at-risk species are involved, before approval is given on a proposed project.

Now more than ever before, it is critical that we ensure the need of the aggregate sector for growth is governed within the parameters of responsible environmental stewardship in order to achieve a truly sustainable model for this sector. BurlingtonGreen’s contention is that the Aggregate Resource Act must be amended such that it is not able to override environmental protection afforded by other legislation such as the Green Belt Plan, and that furthermore, measures to ensure adequate replacement of any lost tree canopy be included in the planned activity as part of the requirement for approval of new or expanded aggregate activities. Far from categorizing these measures as ‘red tape’, we view them as vitally necessary elements to achieving a successful and efficient aggregate industry in Ontario that operates without compromising ecological sustainability in the broadest sense.

Our reasons for taking this position are as follows:

**Legislative Jurisdiction:**

We contend that jurisdiction over the aggregate industry must be a shared responsibility between the Province and local/municipal government, and that both levels of government have an important role to play:

- The Province’s role in enforcing other acts to safeguard at-risk species, canopy cover, water sources, green belt areas and farmland must be a key factor in ensuring that provincially-designated protections are not over-ridden either at the local or provincial level.
- That being said, the approval of aggregate operations cannot be solely within provincial jurisdiction. There is a strong need for local oversight to safeguard local water tables, tree canopy, local biodiversity, agricultural land, and other locally-identified priorities, and ensure that the concerns and rights of the local citizenry are addressed.
- At the same time, local decisions to grant licences in perpetuity should be amended to eliminate grandfathering of agreements beyond a specified time frame, in order to take into consideration changing environmental factors.

Our vision is for a collaborative framework between the Province, local government and the community, that would bring into play a combination of provincial legislation, local official plans and by-laws, with a clearly defined process for addressing and resolving potential conflicts, while advancing innovative solutions. This has little to do with 'red tape' and everything to do with creating the right context for innovative thinking and problem-solving. Only by achieving such a model can we effectively meet the demand for aggregate materials to support our human infrastructure in a manner that doesn't compromise the environment which sustains us over the long term.

### **Protecting Forest Lands:**

Aggregate extraction operations often take place on large patches of forest lands. [Forests play a unique role in the carbon cycle](#), and healthy, middle-aged stands remove carbon at a faster rate than either young or old forests. In addition, [large healthy trees greater than 77 cm in diameter remove approximately 70 times more air pollution annually than small healthy trees less than 8 cm in diameter](#).

Forest management strategies to increase carbon sinks or reduce emissions include increasing or at least maintaining forest area. These strategies are central components of forests and climate change mitigation. When forests are converted to other land-use, the carbon stocks left on the site gradually decay and are not replaced by the carbon sink of new growth. While reducing carbon emissions is important, by itself this strategy cannot achieve the overall emission reduction we need in 11 short years to hold warming at the recommended 1.5 degrees, even were we to achieve the reductions that have been targeted, which seems increasingly unlikely. In view of this, we must work hard to preserve forest lands to at minimum absorb emissions while we get them under control.

Forest lands also provide habitat for both plant and animal species, including those on the endangered species list. The biodiversity found in naturally occurring forests helps safeguard against pests and diseases that affect single species (e.g. emerald ash borer).

Furthermore, forested areas and woodlots are part of our defence system against flooding and the costly damage floods can inflict on communities which will have an increasingly negative economic impact. Since we know that flooding occurrences will become more and more frequent as our climate changes, it behooves us to make sure we don't destroy forests, which are our natural ally in the mitigation of floods.

### **Preserving Prime Farmland and Food Supply:**

BurlingtonGreen agrees with the position taken by the North Dufferin Agricultural Community Task (NDACT) Force in its recent submission to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. We believe that the erosion of prime agricultural land in Ontario is a cause for concern, both for economic reasons, and for food security reasons. Climate change is causing the loss of arable land at an alarming rate, and it will be important to preserve local farmland against the day when some of our more remote food sources, quite literally, dry up. While flooding will be a problem in some areas, droughts will become a major concern across much of the area we currently depend on in the United States for produce, and in our own prairie lands for grain production. The ability to produce food locally in Ontario (primarily southern Ontario), will become increasingly important to sustaining Ontario's growing population. Under no circumstances should aggregate extraction activities take priority over prime farmland.

## **Solutions/Ways Forward:**

We believe it is important to be mindful of the bigger picture, and to address the issue of aggregate industry regulation within the context of our overall provincial economy, the local environment that sustains us and the overarching exigency of climate change and its impacts. We therefore propose that:

- The demand for aggregates and the economic contribution of the sector be realistically assessed, both in terms of the quantity and flow of material needed to support planned growth, and the role of this industry in the province's overall economy. Gravel Watch Ontario in its March 2019 submission on aggregate reform, has pointed out that neither is there a current or expected shortage of aggregate stocks, nor will growth in this sector provide any significant improvement to the provincial economy overall. And NDACT points out in its [submission](#) that while "the aggregate industry contributes almost \$1.4 billion to Ontario's economy and supports almost 20,000 direct and indirect jobs." (source OSSGA Untangling Red Tape), in 2017 Ontario's family farm and food processing businesses contribute \$39 billion to Ontario's economy and employ over 820,000 Ontarians. Agriculture and agri-food processors are the number one economic contributor to Ontario's overall economy. (Source: Ontario Federation of Agriculture)".
- Given the alarming depletion of agricultural land due to development, future new and expanded aggregate extraction operations should not be approved within municipal boundaries or on prime farmland.
- Only where tree removal is necessitated, legislate a more robust tree replacement model using carbon absorption formulas to replace lost trees with canopy of equivalent carbon absorption equivalency at the time of tree removal (on alternate land if necessary).
- Explore aggregate resource recovery as part of the circular economy (e.g. reclaimed brick, concrete, road materials etc.) and initiate measures to encourage aggregate recycling and re-use.

## **Conclusion:**

BurlingtonGreen has grave concerns that under the guise of untangling and reducing 'red tape', the Government of Ontario is in fact proposing to roll back a number of critically important environmental protection measures while compromising the ability of local government to have a say in what happens at the community level. While we recognize the value of and need for aggregates to support our infrastructure, we do not believe that the aggregate sector should take priority over the agricultural sector or the safeguards embedded in other legislation to conserve biodiversity, forest land, water sources and protected green spaces. We firmly believe that smart government can find a way to create a sustainable model for aggregate extraction without compromising resources that must be preserved if we are to support long-term sustainability for the people of Ontario.

In the final analysis, the government's job is not to make things easy, but to get things right, for current as well as future generations. Yes, where possible let's find efficiencies in how we do business, but NOT at the expense of long-term sustainability. "A place to grow" must be an Ontario where we don't just grow business; it must be a place where we can grow our own food, grow our capacity to produce clean energy, grow our ability to create a green, circular economy and grow our stewardship of the land,

water and air so that we may pass on to future Ontarians a land in which they can grow and prosper. Will that be this government's legacy? Not if it fails us by allowing short-sighted thinking to take the place of long-term sustainable planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on aggregate policies and regulation in Ontario. We look forward to further opportunities to collaborate on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marwa Selim". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marwa Selim

On behalf of the BurlingtonGreen Advocacy Team  
Program Manager and Advocacy Coordinator  
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association

CC: Jane McKenna, MPP, Burlington

CC: Mayor Marianne Meed-Ward and Members of Council