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Luisa D'Amato: With new plan to cut 'red tape,' Ford hurts his own rural base

Opinion Nov 12, 2019 by [Luisa D'Amato \(/waterlooregion-author/luisa-d-amato/412D649F-ED04-4044-9960-516C14EA31B7/\)](/waterlooregion-author/luisa-d-amato/412D649F-ED04-4044-9960-516C14EA31B7/)  [\(/mailto:ldamato@therecord.com\)](mailto:ldamato@therecord.com) Waterloo Region Record

The Doug Ford government is about to make another huge mistake.

It's a plan to relax regulations and oversight on companies that dig sand, gravel and stone out of the ground.

Cutting red tape, the government calls it.

But what is actually being cut is the power of rural municipalities to balance the need for safe roads and clean water against the interests of the powerful industry, which is worth \$1.4 billion a year and creates 20,000 jobs.

Story continues below▼

So certain is the government that it will be able to do this, that the bill passed first reading before the deadline for public consultation had happened.

It is "shocking" that the government would do such a thing, said Stephanie De Grandis, who is a farmer near Rockwood and is on the board of a group called Gravel Watch Ontario.

Additionally, some of the provisions in the bill are dangerous for people who live in rural areas.

"We're fighting it," said Sue Foxton, who is mayor of North Dumfries township.

Story continues below▼

Though it is small in population, North Dumfries is the third-biggest producer in the province of sand, gravel and stone (also known as "aggregate"), which are the raw materials that go into making projects like buildings, bridges, roads and sidewalks.

Foxton is the chair of a group called Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario.

Story continues below▼

Here are the major concerns for municipalities like North Dumfries:

•**Water quality.** Municipalities can regulate how deep an industrial producer digs for aggregate materials. But under the new law proposed by the Ontario government, they will lose that power.

Advocates like Foxton and De Grandis say that's a problem, because if a producer digs below the water table, the chances of contaminating the groundwater, and disrupting the supply, are higher.

The very layers of gravel and sand that the industrial producers want to use for new construction are what provide a natural filtration system for the water, making it safe to drink.

Additionally, if the bedrock gets fractured by mining activity, the water flow could be disturbed as it seeps into the cracks, De Grandis said.

She's part of a group trying to [stop \(https://www.guelphtoday.com/local-news/rockwoods-hidden-quarry-battle-coming-to-a-climax-1389699\)](https://www.guelphtoday.com/local-news/rockwoods-hidden-quarry-battle-coming-to-a-climax-1389699) a quarry near Highway 7 just west of Rockwood.

The Ontario government has promised it will introduce new measures to protect water quality, but hasn't been clear about the specifics, De Grandis said.

•**Gravel trucks on rural roads.** Under this legislation, municipalities will lose control over the "haul routes" where the gravel trucks travel back and forth.

Some of the roads are on vulnerable land formations that may be distorted or even damaged by the wear and tear imposed by these heavy trucks, Foxton said.

A lot of these roads can't take that kind of pounding.

"We're the countryside," she said. "We can't make every road a superhighway."

Foxton thinks part of the problem is lack of knowledge due to inadequate consultation with the municipalities about some of these issues.

"They should have come and asked us first."

There's a lack of knowledge on the part of "people sitting in an office building in Toronto that have no concept" of life in rural areas.

What's so extraordinary about this move is that it attacks people in the very heart of the Progressive Conservative support base.

Rural southern Ontario is a reliable supporter of the party in power, and has been for many years.

So why are Ford's MPPs and cabinet ministers turning on them?

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