



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Few Inspections and Limited Enforcement of Aggregate Pits and Quarries Increase Risk of Violations Such as Over-Extraction and Incomplete Rehabilitation

(TORONTO) An inadequate number of inspections by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, coupled with a shortage of experienced inspectors, contributes to aggregate pits and quarries not adhering to extraction limits and other requirements. The Ministry does not ensure aggregate sites are promptly rehabilitated once extraction is complete, Acting Auditor General Nick Stavropoulos said today.

“Aggregates — sand, gravel, stone and rock — are needed to build everything from highways to hospitals, but regular inspections and enforcement of pits and quarries are required to help minimize impacts on communities and the environment,” said Stavropoulos.

Low rates of inspection may be due to a shortage of experienced aggregate inspectors. We found that, as of May 2023, there were 34 designated inspectors across the entire province, and close to half of them held their designations for less than one year. In 2022, only 16 inspectors conducted field inspections. Half of the province’s 18 districts had either zero inspectors or one inspector each.

In our audit, only 35 per cent of the aggregate sites we reviewed had been inspected by the Ministry in the last five years. Despite high rates of non-compliance, inspectors rarely referred cases for enforcement. From 2018 to 2022, only 36 to 52 per cent of sites inspected each year were compliant. In the same five years, inspectors referred only 26 cases, less than 1 per cent of the over 3,400 violations identified during this time, for enforcement. We also found instances where operators had exceeded their extraction limits, in three cases by over 1,000 per cent, but the Ministry did not investigate or charge.

Despite provincial policy that aggregate extraction is to be an interim land use, the Ministry has no processes to ensure that aggregate pits and quarries are rehabilitated soon after extraction is complete. We found that 1,524 sites with valid permits or licences have lain dormant for at least 10 years. Of these sites, 257 have reported no aggregate extraction for more than 25 years. There is a risk that these sites have finished extraction but are avoiding rehabilitation efforts.

“Limited inspection and enforcement, and the lack of experienced inspectors, means that the Province is not doing enough to maintain a balance between the need for aggregates for Ontario’s growing population, and the need to minimize the impacts of aggregate operations on the environment and communities,” said Stavropoulos.

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