

February 13, 2026

To whom it may concern,

As a scholar of Underground Railroad history in Michigan, I am writing to express my concern that the Levy-Norvell Mining operation will negatively impact the culturally and historically significant Watkins Farm Underground Railroad site. In 2020, "Watkins Farm" (1,112 acres) was honored with inclusion in the U.S. National Park Service Network to Freedom Program and the Michigan Freedom Trail Register. Watkins Farm is the only Underground Railroad site listed in Jackson County associated with a kidnapping. It is open to the public to explore and experience.

Here is a brief history of the site:

- In 1847, a Kentucky slaveholder attempted to kidnap John Felix White from Watkins Farm to force him back into enslavement. The owner of this property, Royal Watkins, and neighbors in Adrian and Manchester, prevented his capture. A posse of armed men marched across the fields in pursuit and then confronted Watkins at his house.
- In 1850, The U.S. passed a Fugitive Slave Law after slaveholders failed to capture formerly enslaved people in free states. This law is cited as a leading cause of the Civil War.
- In 2016, the Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources purchased 717 acres of Glenn Trolz Farm in Norvell Township, Jackson Co. originally owned by Watkins. An adjoining 405 acres was purchased by the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission. Watkins Lake State Park & County Preserve was dedicated October 26, 2016. It offers hiking, birding, photography, wildlife viewing, and the setting for historic interpretation.
- In 2019, WCPARC staff worked with USFWS and Duck Unlimited to restore 70 acres of forest, grassland, and wetlands.
- In 2020, Park and Preserve expanded with walking and cycling trails.
- Waterfowl Refuge Designation

Over the past decade many organizations and guides have conducted educational and cultural programs and tours; including the Michigan History Center, African American Museum of Washtenaw County, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Dept., Manchester Historical Society, and others.

These are the primary reasons a gravel mining operation should **not be permitted**:

1. Mining is not compatible with interpretation (tours and programs) of a national and state recognized Underground Railroad site.
2. The noise, dust, and silica will cause unreasonable harm to tourists, trail walkers and cyclists.
3. The Waterfowl Refuge is a seasonally sensitive area that could be lost permanently.
4. Plans to improve historical signage, programs and facilities will likely be dropped.

Thank you for your consideration.

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