

MYTHS v. FACTS from Concerned Citizens

About This Document

American Aggregates of Michigan (AAOM) has applied to construct a large-scale industrial sand and gravel mine adjacent to Watkins Lake State Park & County Preserve in Norvell Township. This document summarizes key facts addressing common claims about the proposal. An extended version, including all sourcing and citations, is available at IHCCinfo.org.

MYTH: “The mine will be a financial windfall for the township and its residents.”

FACTS: AAOM provides no supporting evidence for long-term financial benefits to the community.

- The mine would employ only 6 to 8 people, including some existing employees.¹
- Studies of property values near other Michigan gravel mines found reductions of up to 30%,² which can reduce taxable property values and, in turn, local tax revenues over time.
- The project proposes heavy truck traffic every 3–4 minutes, adding wear to township roads and increasing long-term maintenance costs.³

BOTTOM LINE: *Potential revenues must be weighed against potential costs. A gravel deposit is finite; impacts on roads, land use, and community character may persist long after it is extracted.*

MYTH: “The land has already been degraded; a gravel mine wouldn’t make it worse.”

FACTS: Farmland and gravel mines are not equivalent land uses.

- The project would convert hundreds of acres of rural land into a 20-year industrial operation.
- The site borders Watkins Lake State Park and rare prairie fen ecosystems, which are highly sensitive to groundwater changes and support rare and protected species.⁶
- Scientific assessments specifically recommend protective buffers around these prairie fens.¹²

BOTTOM LINE: *The issue at hand is about future land use. Is replacing rural land with a large industrial mine an appropriate land use next to a state park and sensitive wetlands? We say “no”.*

MYTH: “We need gravel and it has to come from somewhere.”

FACTS: The issue isn't "gravel or no gravel." The issue is its proposed location.

- The proposed site borders a state park, rare wetlands, and residential communities.¹⁶
- Michigan law requires townships to consider impacts on surrounding land uses.¹³
- IHCC analysis identified 14 active sand and gravel operations already serving AAOM’s market under their own market assumptions.¹⁷

BOTTOM LINE: *This is not about whether gravel is needed. It is about whether this specific location is appropriate given its environmental and community impacts.*

MYTH: “There’s nothing we can do to stop the mine.”

FACTS: In reality, the legal framework supports a well-grounded denial:

- Under MCL 125.3205, the township may deny a mining permit if “very serious consequences” would result. The applicant bears the burden of proof – not the township.¹⁹

- In 2022, the Norvell Township Board, following advice from the township attorney, adopted an updated mining ordinance governing permit applications for mineral extraction.²⁰
- Sharon Township recently denied a similar mining application and has successfully defended that decision in court.²¹

BOTTOM LINE: *Norvell Township has legal tools to evaluate and, if warranted, deny this application based on evidence and ordinance standards.*

MYTH: “Fighting the mine would bankrupt Norvell Township, and we’d still end up with a gravel pit.”

FACTS: AAOM and its parent company Levy Co. are indeed large companies with substantial resources. But that doesn’t mean Norvell Township is powerless.

- Norvell Township carries insurance to cover risks of losses.²²
- IHCC is raising funds for a legal defense fund.
- The Sharon Township denial demonstrates that a permit denial grounded in the law and the factual record is absolutely defensible.²³

BOTTOM LINE: *The best defense against a lawsuit is for the Township’s decision to be grounded in evidence and arise from a legal process – not fear of litigation itself.*

MYTH: “Opposition is mostly coming from people outside Norvell Township.”

FACTS: Opposition to this mine has largely come from within Norvell Township.

- Over 800 Norvell Township property owners have signed petitions opposing this mine.²⁴
- Impacts would extend to neighboring townships, state parks, and communities along the haul route.²⁵ Michigan law explicitly requires consideration of these broader impacts as well.²⁶

BOTTOM LINE: *This is not an “us vs. them” issue. Opposition is wide-spread.*

MYTH: “Those opposing the mine must be making money off this fight.”

FACTS: This claim is false:

- IHCC is an all-volunteer organization with no financial stake in the outcome of this application.
- Funds are being raised primarily for experts and lawyers to ensure a defensible public record.
- We are thoughtful and transparent about every dollar spent. Any community member with questions about our finances is welcome to meet with us directly.

BOTTOM LINE: *Attacking who is speaking up doesn’t answer whether the mine is a good idea. The real questions are about impacts – to roads, property values, water, parks, and community character.*

THE BIG PICTURE

The existence of gravel does not automatically justify mining it at this location. Michigan law requires decision-makers to weigh the public value of extraction against its impacts on neighboring land uses, natural resources, public infrastructure, and the broader community. The question before Norvell Township is whether the benefits of this mine outweigh those impacts. IHCC remains committed to ensuring that residents and decision-makers have access to the facts, expert analysis, and public participation needed to make that decision wisely.