



# Mountain View GAZETTE

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## Municipalities urged to back stance against gravel mining

*Paul Frey, Mountain View Gazette*

The Mountain View Regional Water Services Commission is in the process of getting support from municipalities for its stance against gravel mining in alluvial aquifers, specifically in the Red Deer/Medicine River aquifer.

The commission sent out a memo to members of the Red Deer River Municipal Users Group on April 2 outlining concerns it has against continued gravel mining in the area.

The memo said that Alberta is the second largest producer of sand and gravel in Canada after Quebec. Although the amount of gravel mined in Alberta is difficult to determine, the memo estimates that 54 million tonnes were produced in the province in 2008 and that the value of the gravel extracted was about \$478 million. The memo said that even though Alberta Energy, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Environment govern gravel extraction in the province, none of them knows the total amount of gravel mined throughout the province.

The memo states that habitat for fish and wildlife can be adversely affected by sometimes changing groundwater levels.

"Long-term implications of gravel mining can result in contaminated groundwater, which can affect well water that families rely upon. This contamination of groundwater can happen when the clay-rich sediment that seals the surface of an aquifer is broken," the memo states.

"These gravel deposits, alluvial aquifers, are integral to the health of a river."

The memo also outlined seven reasons why gravel mining could have negative impacts on the Red Deer River Basin, including reduced river flow during time of drought, channel instability and migration and sediment loading affecting water treatment, among others.

Olds town council directed Mayor Judy Dahl to write a letter of objection to gravel mining to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills MLA Richard Marz, as well as copy the letter to Rob Renner, the Minister of Environment and Mel Knight, Minister of Sustainable Resources. Councillors from the Town of Bowden directed Mayor Cody Berggren on April 12 to write a letter to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake MLA Luke Ouellette and other officials recommending that more study on the issue be undertaken.

While Berggren said he personally supports the stance of protecting the watershed, he understands the concern that there may be some people who think that more conclusive evidence needs to be found before gravel mining should be slowed in the watershed.

"My personal opinion, waterways are something that we need to protect," he said.

Commission chair Warren Smith said the main concern for both the commission and municipalities is the sustainability of the flow of water for the long term.

"We're all in this together. Whether your water comes from the water commission or it comes from another water treatment plant in the pipeline, we're all taking water out of that Red Deer River and the sustainability of that flow to meet our needs over the long time is our big concern," he said.

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