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Gravel Mining Puts Water at Risk

Alberta's gravel mining policy significantly erodes environmental protection by allowing gravel mining to occur in the 1:100 year floodplain of rivers. Documents obtained by private citizens in a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) request reveal that Alberta's internal sand and gravel mining policy was developed and approved in 2011 in a secretive process that ignored expert scientific advice and excluded the public.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) believes the Alberta government must conduct a science-based, transparent review of the current sand and gravel policy so that mining does not occur within the 1:100 year floodplain and minimizes water and wildlife impacts.

"Gravel mining in the 1:100 year floodplain poses significant and long lasting environmental risks to local water quality, groundwater, and wildlife," says Joanna Skrajny, AWA Conservation Specialist. "Intact floodplains are critical to provide natural flood and drought mitigation, as well as clean drinking water and habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species."

The *Surface Water Body Aggregate Policy* was approved in January 2011 without public input or legislative review. AWA notes that this policy has never been made available to the public and the process in which it was developed - resulting in weakened environmental protection - represents a serious failure on behalf of the government to represent the public interest.

Dale Christian, a landowner in the Red Deer River watershed, says: "We aren't opposed to all gravel mining, but my community, my family, and our working farm rely entirely on groundwater connected through the floodplain; the health of our drinking water depends on healthy aquatic ecosystems. Currently, our communities and homes are at risk without science based protection being placed on gravel mining activities in floodplains."

Donna Mendelsohn, a landowner in the Athabasca River watershed, adds: "It's critically important to communities that Alberta's sand and gravel resources be managed more responsibly to safeguard aquatic ecosystems. I hope that our government will take the steps necessary to protect our river corridors and water bodies, including floodplains, wetlands and aquifers, from gravel mining."

Prior to the current policy, there was a working understanding among provincial regulatory agencies that would reject new applications for aggregate extraction activities within active river channels and the 1:100 year floodplain zone. The existing policy is significantly weaker than previous practices. Concerns raised by provincial biologists, such as the need to acknowledge the ecological impacts of floodplain mining, were not addressed in the 2011 policy.

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