

Aggregate Mining

Topic Selection Background Information

March 2024

Program Overview	<p>Aggregate mining is the extraction of sand, gravel, and crushed stone for use in a wide variety of construction projects. The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) requires local governments to conduct environmental reviews of certain proposed aggregate mining projects. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) issues water quality permits for extractive industries such as aggregate mining.</p>
Original Evaluation Questions	<p>What is the process for establishing aggregate mining sites, and which agencies are involved in this process? Which agencies oversee established aggregate mining sites, and what are their responsibilities? To what extent have aggregate mining sites complied with applicable regulations and standards?</p>
Revised Questions	<p>To what extent does Minnesota law regulate the annexation of land by municipalities for purposes of mining permitting? To what extent have the recommendations of the 2017 legislative Aggregate Resources Task Force been implemented?</p>
State Resources <i>Low</i>	<p>The exact amount MPCA spends on water permitting for aggregate mining is unclear, but in Fiscal Year 2022 the Industrial Division (which includes aggregate mining) expended \$18.9 million. EQB expenditures in Fiscal Year 2022 were \$1.3 million.</p>
State Control <i>Medium-High</i>	<p>The state has the authority to regulate aggregate mining through environmental review and wastewater permitting requirements (the latter of which is also subject to federal regulation through the Clean Water Act). Counties, townships, and municipalities also have authority to regulate extractive industries through zoning ordinances.</p>
Impact <i>Medium</i>	<p>A Department of Natural Resources mapping project in 25 Minnesota counties has identified nearly 500 active aggregate sites. The total number of active aggregate sites is likely higher when taking into account sites in the 62 other Minnesota counties not included in this project. Although aggregate mining does not produce the hazardous byproducts that accompany the extraction of other minerals, the associated physical disturbances can damage sensitive ecosystems.</p>
Timeliness <i>Medium</i>	<p>With Minnesota projected to add about 850,000 new residents by 2070, demand for new construction and the required aggregates will likely be strong.</p>
Feasibility <i>Medium</i>	<p>OLA could complete this evaluation using traditional evaluation methods. However, OLA would not evaluate the technical aspects of individual site permitting and compliance.</p>
Balance <i>Medium</i>	<p>OLA evaluated MPCA’s petroleum remediation program in 2022 and examined MPCA’s oversight of Water Gremlin in 2021.</p>
Discussion <i>Limited Scope</i>	<p>OLA will conduct a limited scope review of Aggregate Mining based on availability of staff.</p>