



Aggregate Resources

Little has been done in the past six years to implement most legislative task force recommendations from 2018.

Report Summary

Since the 1980s, policymakers have convened a number of task forces and committees to address issues related to aggregate resources. Most recently, in 2018, a legislative Aggregate Resources Task Force released a report with several recommendations for the Legislature, DNR, and local governments.

Aggregates Mapping

We reviewed Minnesota law and DNR data to determine whether the Legislature had implemented recommendations related to the Aggregate Resource Mapping Program.

- The task force recommended that the Legislature fund the Aggregate Resource Mapping Program at \$950,000 per year for ten years to enable DNR to complete maps throughout Minnesota. However, the Legislature has appropriated less than 20 percent of the recommended funding in the past eight fiscal years. (p. 14)
- The task force funding recommendation would have paid for the completion of six maps per year. With lower levels of funding, DNR completed only four maps between 2018 and 2024. Over the course of its roughly 40-year history, the Aggregate Resource Mapping Program has completed mapping for 23 counties and partially mapped 2. (pp. 14-15)

Local Government Planning, Zoning, and Permitting

We surveyed the planning and zoning administrator in each Minnesota county to learn about the extent to which counties have implemented the task force’s recommendations for local government planning, zoning, and permitting.

- The task force recommended that local governments “review and update their comprehensive plans to evaluate the impact of zoning on current and future accessibility to aggregate resources.” According to our survey, just over one-half of the

Background

Aggregates are bulk materials, including sand, gravel, and crushed stone, that are used in both private and public construction. Because aggregates are heavy and used in large volume, they are expensive to transport. It is, therefore, preferred to source aggregates near where they will be used. Aggregates have been mined in every county in Minnesota, but availability of aggregate resources is declining for a variety of reasons.

Statutes contain few requirements related to aggregate planning and protection, and most requirements that exist are directed to local governments. For example, certain local governments must develop land use plans that include information about aggregates.

Statutes do require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to identify potentially valuable aggregate resources and provide that information to local governments so that the governments can consider aggregate resource protection in their land use decisions. DNR performs this duty through its Aggregate Resource Mapping Program.

77 administrators who reported that their counties have comprehensive plans said those plans have provisions related to aggregate resource protection. (pp. 19-20)

- The task force recommended that, where aggregate information is available, local governments “assess the current and future impacts of all land use designations and easements that restrict access to aggregate resources.” While 76 county administrators reported that their counties have zoning ordinances, only 4 said those ordinances prohibit development on lands identified as containing aggregate resources. (pp. 20-21)
- The task force recommended “further study of statutory and regulatory changes to the process by which conditional use and interim use permits related to aggregate resources are issued and reviewed.” Such studies have not occurred, although the majority of survey respondents indicated their county requires conditional use permits (49) or interim use permits (21) for new aggregate mining operations. (pp. 21-22)

Aggregate Mine Reclamation

- The task force recommended that the state, local governments, and mining companies promote reclamation (preparing a former mining site for its next use) efforts. About three-quarters of the county administrators that responded to our survey reported that their counties require new aggregate mining operations to submit a reclamation plan. (pp. 23-24)
- The task force recommended that DNR’s reclamation handbook—published in 1992—be updated. The Legislature did not implement the task force’s funding recommendations, and DNR has not updated the handbook. (p. 24)

Conclusion ► If the Legislature is interested in planning for the use and protection of aggregate resources, it should consider implementing the legislative task force’s recommendations from 2018 and providing greater support and direction to local governments to implement recommendations directed towards those governments. (p. 27)