

Why proposed lime rock mines are a danger to you

In Southwest Florida, protecting our water resources is paramount. Wildlife, plants and even humans cannot thrive if there is an imbalance.

That's why Lee County and Florida created the Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR) area in 1990. This region of southeast Lee County protects and stores a crucial supply of groundwater, and helps ensure cleaner water flows downstream and into Estero Bay.

To protect that land, rules were put in place allowing four primary types of land use within the DR/GR: low-density residential, agriculture, open space/recreation and conservation. A fifth type of land use – natural resource extraction – can also be approved through the county's rezoning process.

However, lime rock mining presents incompatibilities with the DR/GR's mission of protecting groundwater and surface water. Mining also is not compatible with other potential land uses in the DR/ GR, specifically conservation and residential.

That's why in 2010, Lee County ruled that mining activities should be congregated along the Alico Road corridor, which would prevent incompatibilities with other land uses. Still, mining applications continued flowing into Lee County for proposed locations well outside of the established Alico Road mining corridor.

And while we recognize the need for lime rock for future development, current studies show that enough supplies are available for existing mines for the next 30-plus years. Now in 2018, another pair of mining applications have been submitted to Lee County, and their proposed locations truly are worrisome. Old Corkscrew Plantation has filed a request to rezone 4,204.87 acres of DR/GR land from agricultural to industrial planned development, specifically for mining.

Old Corkscrew has proposed blasting as part of its application, and the company is requesting excavation depths as deep as 110 feet. Meanwhile, Troyer Brothers Mine has asked to rezone 1,732.75 acres from agriculture to industrial planned department, with a maximum mine depth of 110 feet for a mining operation that could last 35 years. If approved, these mining applications will cause significant ecological damage to a region that we're supposed to be protecting.

By its very nature, lime rock mining causes immediate ecological damage to hydrologic flow ways and wildlife habitat. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Lee County's DR/GR contains important wetland areas and is home to a variety of habitats for listed species, and is located in close proximity to several conservation and mitigation lands.

The Airport Mitigation Park, for example, is used to mitigate wetland and species losses from construction of the airport. Nearby, the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed

contains the largest remaining stand of undisturbed bald cypress and slash pine flatwoods in Florida. The Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary protects the largest wood stork rookery in the nation.

This land also is an important habitat for the endangered Florida Panther. Over the years, there has been significant public and private investment in adjacent and nearby conservation lands, and allowing mines in these locations would needlessly put those lands at risk.

Old Corkscrew's application currently is making its way through the zoning process. Residents of the rural area, including Wildcat Farms, already have issued passionate speeches in front of the hearing examiner. Homeowners spoke against the proposed blasting and mining activities, fearing their homes, rural lifestyle and wildlife would be destroyed.

Once the hearing examiner renders a decision, the Lee County Board of County Commissioners will make a final decision.

Troyer Brothers application also is in the zoning process and is set to go before the hearing examiner on June 26. You can still have your voice heard on the Troyer proposal.

However, if you want Lee County Commissioners to hear your opinion, too, you must be present and speak during the hearing examiner's public comment period. We urge everyone who is concerned about the well-being of their environment, wildlife, water resources and character of this community to speak against these mining applications. To find out additional information about the proposals and how to make your voice heard, please visit NoMine-On82.com.

Kelly McNab is an environmental planning specialist with the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.