

Town puts price on quarry restoration

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Town of Saukville officials have made no secret of their desire to make their community less enticing to mining operations.

Mother Nature has made that task difficult, because of the rich deposits of sand and gravel in the township.

While town leaders have been unable to come up with a way to ban mining and quarrying in the community, officials took the next-best step at the last Town Board meeting — setting financial expectations for the reclamation of quarry sites.

Supervisors unanimously approved a financial worksheet that spells out the anticipated cost of restoring quarry sites. A performance bond would be required of future quarry operators to cover those expenses.

The worksheet was developed by the town's Quarry Committee drawing heavily from new state legislation.

Supr. Kate Smallish, a member of the committee, said the town's performance bonds for quarrying operations have been woefully inadequate.

Smallish said operators have had to post as little as \$5,000 as assurance that they will restore a quarry site when mining is completed.

"In a worst-case scenario, if a company goes out of business or just walks away from a quarry, the bonds we now require are never going to cover the cost of site reclamation," she said.

The new worksheet uses actual cost estimates for various reclamation measures, with the bonds to be set based on the acreage of the site.

The document estimates it could cost as much as \$8,100 an acre to do basic restoration of a quarry site.

Seven public and private sources were used to calculate the reclamation costs that the town says should be covered by a performance bond:

- The Ozaukee County Highway Department estimated it costs \$47 an hour to plant trees.
- The county's Land Conservation Department estimates supplying tree saplings costs \$120 an acre.
- The Wisconsin Department of Transportation estimates it costs \$10.25 per square yard to remove an asphalt access road, \$116 an acre for fertilizing and 35 cents a square yard for mulching.

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- Nicolet Minerals Co. estimates it costs \$1,300 an acre to replace topsoil and \$800 an acre for final grading.
- The Pennsylvania Mining and Reclamation Bill of 2009 estimates it costs \$3,870 for rough site grading.
- Iowa Pheasants Forever estimates it costs \$117 an acre for grass seed.

To complete the worksheet, town officials will multiply those costs by the amount of acreage that needs to be restored.

“We intend to be far more strict in covering costs when setting our bonds. We didn’t just pick numbers out of the air. Because we don’t have our own crew, this is what we would have to pay someone to do the work,” Smallish said.

Town Chairman Barb Jobs said the worksheet does a better job of holding quarry operators financially accountable for what they do to the environment.

“Is it perfect? Nothing is, but at least we are in the ballpark now for covering expenses,” Jobs said.