



The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

2015 Conservation Award - Non-Member: Miller Paving Limited

This award is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution by a non-member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District. We are recognizing Miller Paving Limited for noteworthy ecological land protection measures in the Braeside Quarry.



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The aggregate industry has long had a bad name amongst those wishing to preserve natural habitats. It is not difficult to understand the dismay when a quarry operator moves in and forests and meadows vanish. So it's not surprising that the proposal by Miller Paving to expand their long-standing Braeside Quarry operation into a portion of Renfrew County's Braeside Alvar caused considerable concern in and about the Arnprior area. Local residents presented a variety of arguments against the quarry expansion, many addressing the protection needs of the rare alvar vegetation and flora. Miller Paving undertook the lengthy program of biophysical investigation of the site required to satisfy a wide range of provincial environmental regulations. Considerable discussion, debate and controversy took place amongst numerous interested parties as these investigations unfolded. Ultimately, as is often the case, the issue was heard before an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing.

In October 2015 the OMB concluded that Miller Paving's natural environment conservation plan satisfied the necessary provincial environmental protection requirements. The Board disapproved of some parts of the development proposal but ruled that its ecological protection measures were sound. What's of particular interest for naturalists and conservations, however, is the unusual - apparently unique - degree to which the project's conservation plan provides for the protection of significant ecological features and functions.

The quarry expansion plan establishes an ecologically self-sustaining Significant Wildlife Habitat Protection Area of over 24 ha, consisting primarily of globally rare alvar forest but also including a comprehensive set of the regionally significant floral and faunal features known from the much larger Braeside Quarry property. Importantly, the Protection Area is legally fixed in place by both the project's approved Site Plan and municipal bylaws. A particularly intriguing aspect of the plan is that even after quarry expansion is completed (likely 80 or more years away), the Protection Area will continue to sustain the largest populations of

provincially rare Ram's-head Orchid (*Cypripedium arietinum*) and Neglected Milk-vetch (*Astragalus neglectus*) known anywhere. In addition, the plan includes a substantial allowance for wildlife corridors and ground water protection and provides for a decade-long monitoring program of the site's ecological integrity.

The key to the success of the Braeside protection plan was the early recognition by the property owners (even before the OMB process was initiated), that exceptional ecological values were present here and that exceptional measures would be required to protect them. They quickly accepted a recommendation that approximately half of the core alvar should be protected from disturbance. This greatly exceeds the normal size of aggregate Protection Areas. Indeed, Miller Paving's OMB-certified development proposal represents the most robust ecological protection plan of any aggregate development in eastern Ontario, if not the whole province.

It is important that examples of enlightened resource management be acknowledged and celebrated. Doing so encourages others in the aggregate and associated industries to produce their own Braeside-like protection plans. Miller Paving has set a new and important conservation standard for its industry. It is accordingly a most worthy recipient of the 2015 OFNC non-member Conservation Award.

(Prepared by Christine Hanrahan, based on material provided by Dan Brunton)

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