

No-cost MAAP program turns gravel pits into natural areas or farmland

by Patrick Raftis

WELLINGTON CTY. —

Paul Hartnett loves his work.

“I’m like Santa Claus. That’s what I tell people. I pop out of the woodwork and spend some money on your back 40 — no strings attached,” states the affable Belwood area resident, who spends his working days turning old gravel pits into fields and meadows.

Hartnett is the rehabilitation supervisor for the Management of Abandoned Aggregate Properties program (MAAP). The program is funded by the Ontario Aggregate Resources Corporation, through a portion (.5 cents per tonne) of the annual 11.5 cents per tonne license fee paid by aggregate producers.

The MAAP program rehabilitates former aggregate pits and quarries deemed to be “abandoned” under the Aggregate Resources Act and conducts and funds rehabilitation research. It’s all done at no cost to qualifying landowners.

Hartnett said the program was created to deal with gravel pits and quarries pre-dating the Aggregate Resources Act requirements for licensees to rehabilitate their sites.

In some cases, landowners contact MAAP and sign an acknowledgement form to confirm their interest in the program. In many cases, said Hartnett, MAAP seeks out landowners using its database of abandoned sites throughout



Back to nature - Paul Hartnett, rehabilitation supervisor for the Management of Abandoned Aggregate Properties program, displays an image of a pit rehabilitation project in progress.

photo by Patrick Raftis

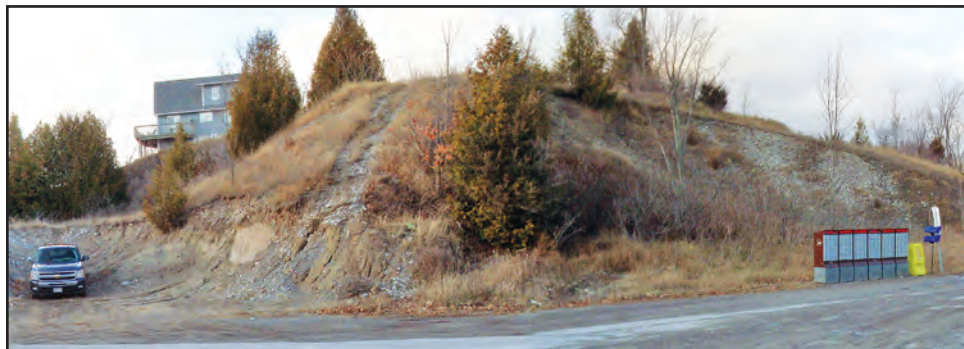
Ontario. Each spring, MAAP staff are sent out to inspect sites and make initial contact with the landowners. If they express interest, Hartnett does a site visit to discuss with the landowner “what they want to see happen.”

If an agreement results, MAAP employees create a design for the rehabilitated land and the project is publicly tendered to contractors. The service is not only free to

landowners, there are no ongoing obligations on their behalf regarding future land use.

“It’s pretty much turnkey for them,” said Hartnett. “It’s the best kept secret in Ontario for a fully-funded program.”

Landowners’ goals for the project are split about 50/50 between naturalization and restoring the land to agriculture. Whether the landowner’s goal is good land stewardship, reclaiming agricultural land or



Eyesore no more - The photo above shows a property before a restoration project was undertaken through the Management of Abandoned Aggregate Properties program, while the photo below shows the same property following restoration work.

submitted photos



simply removing an eyesore, Hartnett said they receive good value from the program.

“I had one landowner in Huron County say to me ‘Paul, I don’t know what you spent on the project, but you gave me \$85,000 worth of value,’” in restored agricultural land, said Hartnett.

Rehabilitation of the abandoned pit or quarry may

include grading and stabilizing slopes to make them safer, grading and seeding sites for agriculture or recreation, or creating and enhancing natural areas for wildlife habitat by planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses. The majority of the projects MAAP works on are small sites of one or two acres, although some are as large as 15. Many of the

abandoned sites are “borrow pits” where gravel was drawn under informal agreements by local contractors working on nearby roads.

Hartnett says the average cost of rehabilitation projects is \$12,000 per hectare. MAAP’s most recent data shows \$240,144 was spent on rehabilitation of 38 sites, totaling 34.4 hectares in 2011. From 1992 to 2011, approximately \$6.7 million was spent rehabilitating 359 sites covering about 557 hectares.

Part of MAAP’s mandate is to spread the rehabilitation work around the province equitably. The program targets regions and counties on a rotating basis each spring and fall. Within those areas, selected projects are grouped to minimize travel and promote efficiency.

“We try to get a concentration of 15 or 20 in a county to make it worthwhile,” said Hartnett.

After spending much of last year in Northern Ontario, Hartnett will be working closer to home this year, with about 20 projects scheduled around Wellington County. Two of those projects will be work for the Grand River Conservation Authority, with other projects slated for locations in Mapleton, Wellington North, Centre Wellington and Guelph-Eramosa.

Hartnett said projects can take anywhere from two days to two weeks and in some cases, no time at all. Sometimes, a site has been overgrown in such a fashion as to require no further naturalization. However, in those cases, MAAP still appreciates the opportunity to examine the site and update its database.

Most of the actual construction work each season is completed in about a month.

In addition to the upcoming work this year, about 18 projects were done in Wellington County in a previous round.

“If you have an old pit, then give us a call and get signed up. We try and do two counties a year and we’re always looking for that magic number of 15 to 20 projects,” said Hartnett, who would be happy to spend a summer working in his own backyard again sometime soon.

“We’re always looking for projects. The more people we have interested in projects and getting signed up, the sooner we’ll be back here again.”

To contact MAAP, call 1-888-2467. For more information go to www.toarc.com.