



Why Winona County Should Ban Frac Sand Mining and Operations

Frac sand operations threaten human health and safety.

Frac sand mining and processing generate silica dust, a known health hazard – enough exposure can cause lung diseases including silicosis, emphysema, COPD, tuberculosis, and lung cancer, as well as immune system diseases.* Neighbors of these operations already experience dust polluting their homes and businesses with harmful respiratory effects, and there has been very little study of the extent of these risks, especially to vulnerable populations. The heavy truck traffic created by the frac sand industry also causes harmful air pollution from diesel fumes and creates a safety risk on rural roads.

*2014 MN Dept. of Health factsheet “Silica Sand Mining & Health”

Frac sand mining destroys the landscape and threatens water quality.

“Reclamation” cannot restore productive farmland. Once a bluff is gone, you can’t bring it back. The sand that would be removed provides the primary filter for water moving into our aquifers. Because of the highly sensitive karst geology of this region, mining and chemically processing sand threaten our drinking water.

Monitoring and regulations have failed in Wisconsin.

Public records and media reports show that frac sand companies have routinely violated regulations and polluted streams, rivers, and wetlands. Chemical-laden wastewater has been handled in an unsafe manner on numerous occasions, threatening groundwater and neighboring properties.*

*2014 LSP report “Breaking the Rules for Profit”

The frac sand industry puts the burden on taxpayers.

Unless frac sand operations are prohibited, the permitting process, monitoring, and enforcement will require additional time and personnel, resulting in higher taxes. Truck traffic generated by the industry will wear roads out at ten times the rate of normal traffic.*

*2012 Winona County Highway Dept. study

Frac sand mining will harm our economy.

Historically, mining does not provide sustained prosperity because of the volatility of the market. Mining also tends to discourage and displace other

economic activity and diversity.* Frac sand mining would put agriculture, tourism, and recreation, which are important parts of Winona County’s economic base, at risk. In 2013 the leisure and hospitality industry in Winona County generated gross sales of \$96,000,000 and sales tax of \$6,500,000.** In 2012 the market value of agricultural products in the county was \$282,000,000.*** The leisure and hospitality industry employed 2,300 people in the county in 2013** and 1,500 were employed in agriculture.**** The relatively small number of jobs generated by frac sand mining are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the industry, as seen in recent layoffs at multiple frac sand operations in Wisconsin.

*2013 study “The Economic Benefits and Costs of Frac-Sand Mining in West Central Wisconsin,” T. M. Power & D. S. Power **2015 Explore Minnesota factsheet “Tourism & Minnesota’s Economy” ***2012 USDA Census of Ag. ****2013 MN Dept. of Ag. Winona County Agricultural Profile

Frac sand mining puts property rights and quality of life at risk.

Studies have repeatedly shown that property values decrease near mines and haul routes.* The noise and light pollution and increased traffic created by the frac sand industry threaten the health and quality of life of Winona County residents. Allowing frac sand operations takes away neighbors’ rights to enjoy the use of their property.

*UW Extension factsheet “What Does the Research Suggest?”; 2006 study “An Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Proposed Stoneco Gravel Mine Operation on Richland Township,” G. A. Erickcek

It is legal and necessary to ban frac sand mining.

Winona County’s Comprehensive Plan includes a value statement supporting “the stewardship of the land and its resources” and goals of “preservation and promotion of agriculture” and “protection and enhancement of the air, water and land resources in the County as a vital ingredient of the living environment.”* Frac sand mining is incompatible with these goals and values. The long-established purpose of zoning is to protect the community’s health, safety, and welfare. There is ample legal precedent for banning activities that threaten these fundamental rights.

*2014 Winona County Comprehensive Plan

It is the responsibility of our elected officials to amend the zoning ordinance to ban any new frac sand operations in the county in order to protect people and the environment.



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