

Proposed mining at UMore park could bring funds to U of M



UMore Park is currently used for agricultural research but in the past has been used for researching munitions production during WWII. Recently, aggregate has been discovered in the park which officials may decide to mine. Photo by Paul Bangasser

BY BRIANA BIRSCHBACH, MINNESOTA DAILY
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An inconspicuous piece of park land southeast of Minneapolis — purchased by the University of Minnesota for \$1 more than 50 years ago — is home to a resource that could translate into millions of dollars for University academics in the coming years.

An environmental impact study is underway on a proposal to mine 360 million tons of a high quality aggregate in the University's UMore Park, a proposal University officials say could spark job creation in a down economy and bring in several million dollars a year for University academics.



The park, located in Rosemount, spreads across 5,000 acres. The proposal seeks to mine the western most 1,600 acres of the park.

Aggregate is a broad term for material used to create asphalt and concrete mixes used for many construction purposes including the development of roadways.

A September 2007 geological assessment launched by Minneapolis-based ProSource Technology, Inc. confirmed that the aggregate on the property — derived from glacial deposits — is of high or commercial quality. But locals and geologists have known about the resource for much longer, Larry Zanko, a fellow at the University of Minnesota, Duluth's Natural Resources Research Institute, said.

"It's one of the last really good quality aggregate supplies available in the immediate metro area," he said, adding that most companies have had to reach out to greater Minnesota for supplies.

Zanko said the aggregate is composed of harder stones, such as granite, crystal and igneous rock, which make for harder roadway material. The park location could house several decades worth of the material, he said.

Zanko said mining at UMore would spark employment in and around the metro area, as well as significant housing and commercial development directly surrounding the park.

The University is already preparing for such development, and has made plans for the potential 13,000 dwellings that could spring up from mining in the area, as well as developing retail areas surrounding the mines, Charles Muscoplat, vice president of statewide strategic resource development at the University, said.

"The vision is to create a completely sustainable, University centric community," he said.

The surrounding development, combined with the several million dollars Muscoplat says will come out of the mining each year, will all be pumped into a Board of Regents proposed Legacy endowment to support academics on campus that otherwise have no set funding.

That money could directly translate into research dollars, scholarships and support for graduate students, he said.

But Muscoplat said the proposal to mine is not a complete "windfall," as the large amount of resources will require a careful, planned commitment that could stretch out more than 40 years.

That potential 40-year development will closely involve the city of Rosemount, where the mines are located — especially considering the city has an ordinance in place now that would not allow the University to mine on the property, Kim Lindquist, community development director with Rosemount said.

"I think as a staff we would entertain mining on the site, but we would have to be sure that there was an ordinance in place that would address neighborhood concerns," she said.

Those concerns include potential dust, noise and truck traffic that will come along with a large mining operation.

But Lindquist said the potential development that could spring up from mining in the area would be consistent with the growth of Rosemount in the last few years.

History of UMore

The land where the park now lies was occupied mostly by farmers between the 1870s and the 1940s, Muscoplat said.

But farm families began vacating their homes in May of 1942 as the federal government began preparing the 5,000 acre site for the Gopher Ordnance Works, a facility to produce "smokeless powder," the basic propellant for American weapons and ammunition.

But World War II ended before the facilities could be properly used, and the land was promptly sold the University in 1947 for \$1 under the promise that they would use the space for research and furthering academics.

Since then, researchers from University programs, including the Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics department and the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences have used the park as a site of research.

Moving forward

Forrest Izuno, an UMore park manager, said a major purpose of the park is to maintain the research and academic mission of the University via research programs, and said he expects that if the University mines in the area it would be done with that mission in mind.

Officials hope to have the environmental impact statement complete by the summer of 2010, after which the Board of Regents will decide on whether or not to mine in the area.

"We hope to make this a world-wise, cutting edge, sustainable community and integrate it with faculty, staff and students in every aspect of its development," Muscoplat said. "And it's no secret that we are trying to make as much money as possible to fill up this legacy endowment for academics while we are at it."

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More U Park

Submitted by The Old Scout (not verified) on Thu, 07/09/2009 - 23:00.
<http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/51187>

Senate Research Committee
Monday, April 27, 2009

Dr. Muscoplat said that UMore Park will be a revenue center for the University, not a cost center.

Professor Dahlberg said he would like to see a financial plan that includes the dollars invested and an estimate of when the University will start to receive money. The University has invested about \$5 million and will need to put in a little more, Dr. Muscoplat said, but he expects that money will be paid back all at once because of the value of the gravel to the University's mining partner.

The University will need to spend more on real estate development, but it will make money from the gravel.

Professor Hays asked what the projected revenue from the known gravel deposits would be.

Dr. Muscoplat said that 3-5 million tons per year would be sold, over several decades, at perhaps \$1 per ton. It is a big number, but it is only possible to sell so much into the local market in any one year. This will not be a windfall, he emphasized.

Professor Hays inquired if they expected to use the money for development. They do not, Dr. Muscoplat said; they expect the developers to pay all the costs of development, not the University.

Will they build quickly in order get a payoff, Professor Hays then asked? The University must be careful, Dr. Muscoplat responded, and developers will be required to adopt plans that carry the University's imprimatur; the University will be in control.

Professor Dengel commented that he would not want to live near dump trucks hauling gravel; he would want the industry cleared out, and usually the gravel is removed and only then is the land developed.

Comment from MN Daily website presents another point of view

Wed, 07/08/2009 - 2:04pm — Bill Gleason (not verified)

Here's some more...

Ann Forsyth is a former U of M faculty member who was the Director of the U's Metropolitan Design Center before she left the U to become Professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. It would appear that this move is a step up and she has quite impressive credentials on her Cornell website.

Thus one might think that the opinion of a former U of M faculty member, who actually did some work on UMore Park planning, is worth considering.

Here is some of what she had to say:

"There are these huge contradictions about it, and there are these unrealistic ideas that it can both make money in the short run and be a model community," Forsyth said.

"It's expensive because you're putting all of this new innovative infrastructure in up-front and you don't recoup it in the long run," Forsyth said. "That kind of counteracts the quick money side of it."

Forsyth said a model community would be much more practical near the university's St. Paul campus rather than in Dakota County.

"It would have to be a fantastic development to counteract its location," she said. "There is no way you're not going to have a number of traffic concerns coming out of it. Unless it is highly designed and then it becomes very expensive."

The take-home message, in his view, Professor Cohen said, is that gravel pits are a dicey business and long-term development around gravel is a leap of faith he is not willing to take.

Professor Ruggles said that aside from the research platform, the University could just sell the land on the market.

Dr. Muscoplat said they studied that alternative and concluded that developing the land with a plan would generate ten times as much money as simply selling the land.

Why would the University get into the development business, Professor Ruggles asked? That is also his question, Professor Dahlberg said: is it proper for the University to do this? It would be investing for academic reasons, but only for a few faculty members. He said he did not know of any other university that has taken on a project like this.

It was agreed that the Committee would return to this subject in the fall, and would wish at that time to see financial projections.

Absolutely amazing...

There are so many holes in this plan that you could drive enough gravel trucks through to fill a football stadium. Is there a business school at this University?

God help us.

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