

DNR urged to get facts on Graymont proposal



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Since first learning in 2011 that Graymont Corporation was interested in a large land acquisition in the eastern Upper Peninsula, the tribe was keenly interested in this land proposal between the State of Michigan and the Graymont Company. My last report that addressed Graymont was this time last year. I will do my best to update again.

I am aware that many folks are supportive of the Graymont sale, particularly in the immediate Rexton area, because it will enhance tax revenue for local government, promises jobs and the mining operation will not hurt

our water sheds or air quality (according to Graymont). I certainly understand that. Probably more than anyone, Lana and I see up close and personal just how depressed the economy is in our region. We see the poverty, the lack of good jobs and the lack of opportunity. We see the lack of access to skilled industrial training for students and young adults and it breaks everyone's heart to see the migration of our young folks to more economically prosperous areas.

Setting aside the science, economic and regulatory arguments for a moment, I humbly and respectfully ask you to look at this issue as a citizen of our tribal nation. The precedent-setting size of this land deal and what that means for federal treaty protected rights in the ceded territory does not bode well for future treaty protections and cannot be ignored. We have a coming Great Lakes Consent Decree negotiation in 2020. I would hope those who rely on treaty-protected rights for their livelihood would be the first to understand and support the position of the tribe.

This time last year, Graymont made its first presentation to Sault Tribe. Their stated plan at that

time was to commence the open pit mining right away. The underground mine would be many years — possibly decades to 75 years — into the future. And they specifically said they had no immediate plans for any sort of processing plant — though they did say a processing plant was possible someday down the road after the strip mine was exhausted and if the business grew to the point where a local plant was necessary and viable.

At this meeting they downplayed the number of jobs the project would create. That seemed very unusual to us because, typically, almost every business that wants to expand will talk constantly about the enormous number of jobs they will bring to an area and we were surprised they weren't playing that card.

Since this presentation to the tribe by Graymont and subsequent 'government-to-government' consultation with the state of Michigan over this proposal, it has been amended at least four times with the most recent amendment change submitted AFTER the recent DNR Commission hearing in Newberry. It certainly makes it difficult to stay abreast and

evaluate the terms. And it feels a little like that game of "Wack-A-Mole."

I was recently in the Rexton area and was surprised when residents showed me flyers and handouts featuring plans and drawings for a multi-million dollar kiln to be constructed and operated in the Rexton area. That certainly is a game changer. Mining and transporting limestone is one thing when you are talking about job creation. Constructing and operating a processing plant is quite another. Why were these plans not addressed by the DNR or Graymont in the most recent government-to-government consultations? Last we heard it was "decades to 75 years." The folks we talked to seemed to feel shovels would be in the ground quite soon.

A limekiln burns coal to drive off the carbonate molecule from limestone to make "lime," which is calcium oxide. Calcium oxide is more useful industrially than calcium carbonate, which is limestone. It is similar to coke ovens where they heat up crushed coal to drive off all sorts of stuff and end up with "coke," which is just about pure carbon and much more useful in steel making. It's

about as polluting as a coal fired power plant — nasty air, acid rain, asthma, mercury in fish and meat animals.

I want to conclude by stressing that I understand how important jobs are to the area. It's easy to be anti-Graymont when you live elsewhere and where employment opportunities are more plentiful. And, I will be the first to say that the tribe needs to do more in the way of economic development. We are the largest employer in the Upper Peninsula and have a payroll of almost \$53 million annually. We, too, care about jobs and job creation in the Upper Peninsula.

The tribal recommendation to DNR Director Creagh at last week's consultation was to NOT make a decision at next week's DNR meeting in Lansing. Hopefully, this will give some time to get this straightened out, whether a processing plant is decades away — as explained to the tribe, or just around the corner — as explained to locals of the community.

Miigwech for listening.
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