



March 26, 2008

EDITORIAL: Bills gut local power on mining

Lee County and Florida need rock for roads and other development, and Lee is a prime source for the material.

But rock mining needs to be regulated by local authorities who care about and understand other needs, such as water supply and environmental protection.

Three bills pending in the Legislature would severely undercut local government power to regulate mining. This is a naked power play by the mining industry and its allies in the Legislature, including two of our own area lawmakers.

Don't fall for the idea that local governments want to stop mining. A moratorium on new mines in an 83,000-acre water resource area in Southeast Lee County to allow for a long overdue study of mining impacts might lead to better regulation of mining, but will not stop it - and doesn't even affect active mines, with years of production ahead of them.

Urge our leaders in Tallahassee to reject these bills or the elements in them that threaten our ability to elect local officials with the power to plan for our future:

- Senate Bill 774 gives local governments three months to decide on approval or denial of new mines; then the governor and Cabinet decide. In Lee at least six are proposed in the water resource area.
- Senate Bill 2406 was filed by Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, whose district includes part of Lee County. It would prohibit local governments from enforcing policy that prevents mining where growth plans allow it.
- House Bill 08-13 is from the Environment & Natural Resources Council, chaired by Trudi Williams, R-south Lee County, and reiterates the essence of Bennett's bill.

"This is an abomination and a kick in the teeth to anyone who believes in local control," says Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann.

We agree.
