

## **Indian Trail fight can and must be won**

The May 15th Middle Township Zoning Board hearing on the site plan submitted by Future Mining finally answered some of the community's many questions – or did it? At the hearing Albrecht and Huen's paid expert witness David Monie, took great pains to explain basic hydrology and to refute some of the public's concerns for impacts to ground and surface water resources.

The witness, who was not a licensed hydrologist, claimed that leveling the 260 acre forest within the heart of Indian Trail would actually dramatically increase recharge into the groundwater table – asserting that water loss through evapotranspiration from existing vegetation far exceeds that which would be lost through evaporation from the proposed 100-acre sand dredging lake.

A simple review of U.S. Geological Survey reports would have enabled the expert witness to quickly determine that water loss rates between the artificial lake and the forest are actually the same – that is unless Future Mining practices the industry standard of hauling wet sands off-site, which according to USGS translates to a loss of millions of gallons of water per year.

What is clear is that the applicant's claim that the proposed mining operation will increase aquifer recharge is false and once again his lack of credibility should weigh heavy on both the public and Zoning Board's mind.

It is pure science fiction to suggest that forest destruction and industrial mining are key to solving the county's already severe water supply issues. What will they think of next? This is the same develop-over-everything faction who'll be back next time with a new batch of expert witnesses arguing that taxpayers must build more desalination plants to ensure every last buildable acre is covered with houses and strip malls.

And yes, Albrecht and Huen has promised to pave this site over with McMansions once they have mined out the very headwater soils that provide recharge to Indian Trail residents' many wells and sensitive wetlands.

So while Future Mining's expert witness claims that creating a denuded moonscape for intensive watershed mining, industrial asphalt crushing, and 200 more heavy diesel trucks on Middle's roadways per day is the highest and best use of land adjacent to neighborhoods and an internationally important refuge, you can't blame residents for remaining unconvinced. For the record, the American Littoral Society, New Jersey Audubon, Sierra Conservation Committee, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and countless residents are also unconvinced.

During the last hearing, the applicant's witness testified that the operation did pose the potential danger of contamination to water supplies. He magnanimously stated that he had convinced Future Mining to install a monitoring well should the Board vote in favor of the project. What a disingenuous offer - the town's engineer had already recommended this very action to the Board months ago.

Still overlooked are resident's pleas for adequate buffers along neighboring property lines and independent environmental impact, noise and traffic studies.

The town should be concerned about resident's wells and fragile ground and surface water resources. Once the forest and top-soil are taken down to porous sands and an artificial lake, the groundwater table will be exposed like an open window to any pollution from above. Considering the shear magnitude of heavy machinery, the perpetual stream of heavy diesels, asphalt crushing, leaking fuel, antifreeze, spills and the potential for banned materials getting in, the threats to public health and safety are real and serious.

Potential threats aside, what is certain is that the project will have unavoidable impacts on quality of life, property values, traffic, air quality and health.

The contaminated dust, industrial noise and 200 heavy diesel trucks per day noisily spewing noxious exhaust past thousands of resident's front porches and lawns will touch everyone in the county.

That's 200 additional sources of lung-damaging particulate-matter and emissions containing over 40 substances, which the US EPA lists as hazardous air contaminants.

This is the same EPA which now proposes to classify diesel exhaust as a probable human carcinogen. If you thought traffic was already bad on Route 47, imagine sitting behind this every day for the next thirty years!

Considering the scale and intensity of the proposed uses, destruction of critical habitat, impacts to air, traffic, quality of life and proximity to an established neighborhood and federal Refuge, this project clearly is not in the public interest, and poses unacceptable risk for adverse impacts to public health and the environment.

The mine and industrial recycling facility include uses which were never wholly articulated to the Board in the initial request for a Use Variance; the proposal far exceeds what was originally described to the Board and, as such, now poses unreasonable risk and harm to both the community and the refuge.

Whatever the Board's decision, this fight can be won if the public stays the course. Early this spring the Wal-Mart Corporation lost a similar fight against dedicated citizens who opposed plans to build a massive supercenter within the federal acquisition boundaries of Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Salem County. It was a fight many said could not be won, but because everyday people had faith in their own ability and fought on, the State handed them a glorious victory. The key to success is making certain that the State hears you – even if local elected officials don't.

*(Matt Blake manages the American Littoral Society's Delaware Bay Program. He has a Master's of Science degree from Antioch University in Resource Management and Administration.)*