

Proposed mining at UMore park could bring funds to academics

Subhead:

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Blurb:

University officials could mine about 360 million tons of high quality aggregate from UMore Park.

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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