



June 16, 2025

**STATEMENT OF MUD RUN CONSERVANCY
IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 181**

Before the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Tim Schaffer, Chair

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Senate Bill 181 on behalf of Mud Run Conservancy.

My name is Kathleen Mathews, and I serve as the current President of Mud Run Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Clark County. As our name suggests, the conservancy was founded in 2018 to protect and preserve Mud Run, the primary waterway in our township. My concerns today extend beyond Mad River Township to include all Ohio waterways and wetlands that may be affected by underground limestone mining.

With 41 years of experience in nursing—26 of those as a nurse practitioner—and 29 years of military service, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel, I bring a strong commitment to accuracy and attention to detail to my advocacy work. I have lived in Clark County for 21 years, eight of which have been spent under the looming presence of a permitted, though currently inactive, 420-acre surface limestone mine.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind?

While underground mining may entail less pronounced surface effects and generate less waste or overburden for removal, it does not present an absence of risks. Limestone and dolostone rocks undergo dissolution over time, resulting in sinkholes, caves, and springs that may indicate karst, as evidenced by Ohio Geological Surveys in Butler County in 2022-2023 and in Warren and Clinton counties in 2023-2024. Mine dewatering presents additional challenges, not the least of which is the loss of roof support by removing the buoyant support of the water.

1. Underground mining can induce ground instability, leading to permanent and undesirable alterations to the landscape and waterways.
2. In fact, even with meticulous planning and execution of mining using the recommended room and pillar technique, pillars can fail with minimal or no prior warning. A study conducted by the Mine and Safety Health Administration reported five significant pillars collapsing at four underground stone mines in the eastern United States between 2015 - 2021. This statistic is particularly alarming considering there are only 100 underground limestone mines in the U.S.

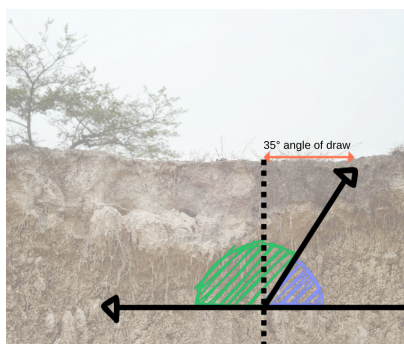
3. Limestone mining can cause irreversible disruption to underground aquifers. While not a frequent occurrence, the possibility of mining intersecting with groundwater exists, resulting in mine flooding. There is an increased potential for groundwater contamination by direct contact with sediment, oil, and gas, potentially causing permanent damage to the aquifer.
4. The discharge of hundreds of gallons of water into any river or stream can lead to downstream flooding, particularly during heavy rainfall events. Dewatering can exacerbate bank erosion of waterways, resulting in increased sediment that can harm fish.

Please remember that while the mining process may be hidden, the above-ground noise, dust, lights, and traffic will not be diminished by underground mining. In fact, underground mining operations may run 24 hours/day with the above-ground work area flooded with stadium-bright lighting. The significant impact on the quality of life of neighboring quarry residents is immeasurable.

Cave In?

Before moving to Clark County, I lived and worked as a nurse practitioner for 32 years in Perry County, Ohio, a portion of which is in Senator Wilkins's district. I am well acquainted with some of the "side effects" of underground mining coal, and while there are vast differences due to the materials involved, some of the hazards remain the same. Riddled with abandoned mines, Perry County is one of the 26 counties that mandates homeowners carry Mine Subsidence Insurance because "regular" homeowners' policies will not cover damage related to mine subsidence.

You may be familiar with the word "subsidence," but, until I read Senate Bill 181, I just said "cave in". No matter what you call it, the possibility of subsidence, especially in karstic limestone, must be considered. The deeper the quarry, the larger the cone of depression, and without the physical support of the water, the risk for subsidence increases. Records indicate it is possible for damage to occur off the mining property line, and accurate mapping of potential areas of subsidence (called the angle of the draw) should be documented. Angle of the draw is another new term for me but a key factor in predicting the extent of ground movement in underground mining. While the determination requires complicated formulas and equations, the concept can be explained by simple geometry:



It's not hard to imagine the possibility of damage occurring beyond the mining property line, and I am very concerned about who will be financially responsible for any damage. Unable to rely on personal homeowners' policies, must residents be financially obligated for mining-related repairs? There was no mention of the availability of Mine Subsidence Insurance. Homeowners with water wells within the dewatering cone of depression must already worry about diminished quantity and quality of their well water. There are provisions in place to address such an event, but they raise

serious concerns. For example, a family of four relying on a temporary water supply for 28 days. That's a conversation worth having on its own, perhaps at another time.

So, it was with great interest I read ORC Section 1514.07 lines 1358 - 1407, which states that even if the operator is at fault for off-mine property damage related to subsidence in "...no event" shall the operator be required to "...repair, restore, mitigate, or remediate any buildings or structures, fixtures, or personal property" not issue an order to provide the property owner with any compensation.

Simply Amend the Surface Permit?

The granting of an underground permit should be taken with utmost seriousness. It is deeply concerning that Senate Bill 181 proposes that the ODNR Chief of the Division of Mineral Resources Management can authorize underground mining in an amendment to an existing surface mining permit. What criteria will the chief utilize to decide if an operator completes a permit or an amendment?

An amendment consists of three pages completed online, while permitting applications require an 11-page guideline. According to ODNR, permitting entails a Technical Review conducted by environmentalists, geologists, blasting experts, soil scientists, and archeologists to ensure that the environmental impact is minimal and that public health and safety measures are in place. An amendment would eliminate these additional safety layers, potentially exposing mine workers, the surrounding community, and wildlife to unnecessary risks.

Conclusion:

Senate Bill 181, as presently composed, is unreasonable and irrational, filled with ambiguous language and lacking basic common sense. It is clearly evidently the current provisions benefit the stakeholders at the expense of the communities' tax dollars and quality of life

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I urge you to consider the long-term impacts of this bill on all the home and business owners whose lives could be forever changed if the land is mined. Please prioritize community voices and uphold responsible stewardship.

References:

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