

Testimony to the Oregon House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water  
concerning

**House Bill 2666**

**Relating to mining on resource lands**

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As a University of Oregon geology professor specializing in resources, I have studied gravel resources in the Willamette Valley for fifteen years, starting when Eugene Sand and Gravel proposed to mine 250+ acres of Class 1 and Class 2 farmland next to Thistledown Farm and Lone Pine Farm just north of Santa Clara. I speak here on my own behalf.

HB 2666 is bad for jobs, bad for Oregon agriculture, and would cause permanent damage to Oregon food production capability. The bill would eviscerate the existing minimal protections under Goal 5 for the best farmland in the Willamette Valley.

Rock aggregate is essential for construction of highways, buildings, bridges and railroads. That rock production, and the employment it provides, can be fully supplied from basalt quarries, as explained in the attached testimony (PDF document filed with the committee administrator). Nearly half of Willamette Valley aggregate comes from sand and gravel pits on floodplains of the Willamette River and its tributaries, and the other half is from Willamette Valley quarries. Nearly all of the valley bottom gravel pits cut into Class 1 and 2 soils that were productive farmland before being mined for gravel.

Of all places on the planet, the Willamette Valley is certainly one of best for supplying aggregate by quarrying basalt from the hills while preserving the best soils for agricultural production. The half of aggregate demand that is met by existing quarry basalt production comes at fully competitive costs, and can readily supply much more. Just as other regions of the country have done, it is time for Oregon to step into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by shifting aggregate production from sand and gravel to quarried basalt and thereby meet its obligation to current and future generations by preserving our very best farm soils for farm production while we still have them to preserve. We either save the soils now or lose them forever. The maps in the appended testimony, Figures 4 and 5, show the large supply of basalt in the valley and the small amount of top quality farm soil underlain by sand and gravel.

HB 2666 would kill jobs because the gravel mining jobs will exist whether the rock is mined from the valley bottom or quarried from the nearby hills shown in Figure 5 in attached written testimony; both valley gravel mining and hillside quarry mining require workers, and the demand for rock and a workforce to mine it will be there regardless of the source, as demonstrated in a study by economist Dr. Ed Whitelaw of EcoNorthwest in a report of 17 July 2000, and again in testimony of 7 August 2001 (both attached in PDF). In the latter testimony, Dr. Whitelaw states the following on the employment issue (p.7):

**Claim:** "If there is a layoff at a [gravel mining] company . . . there is still a net loss of jobs."

**Response:** . . . Whether ES&G [Eugene Sand and Gravel] mines gravel at the proposed site (a supply side effect), demand for aggregate in Lane County will remain unchanged. There will still be demand for roads, streets, commercial developments and all other sources of demand for rock materials. And if, on the supply side, ES&G closes down, then the other gravel suppliers . . . would satisfy the demand by employing ES&G's employees or some other employees."

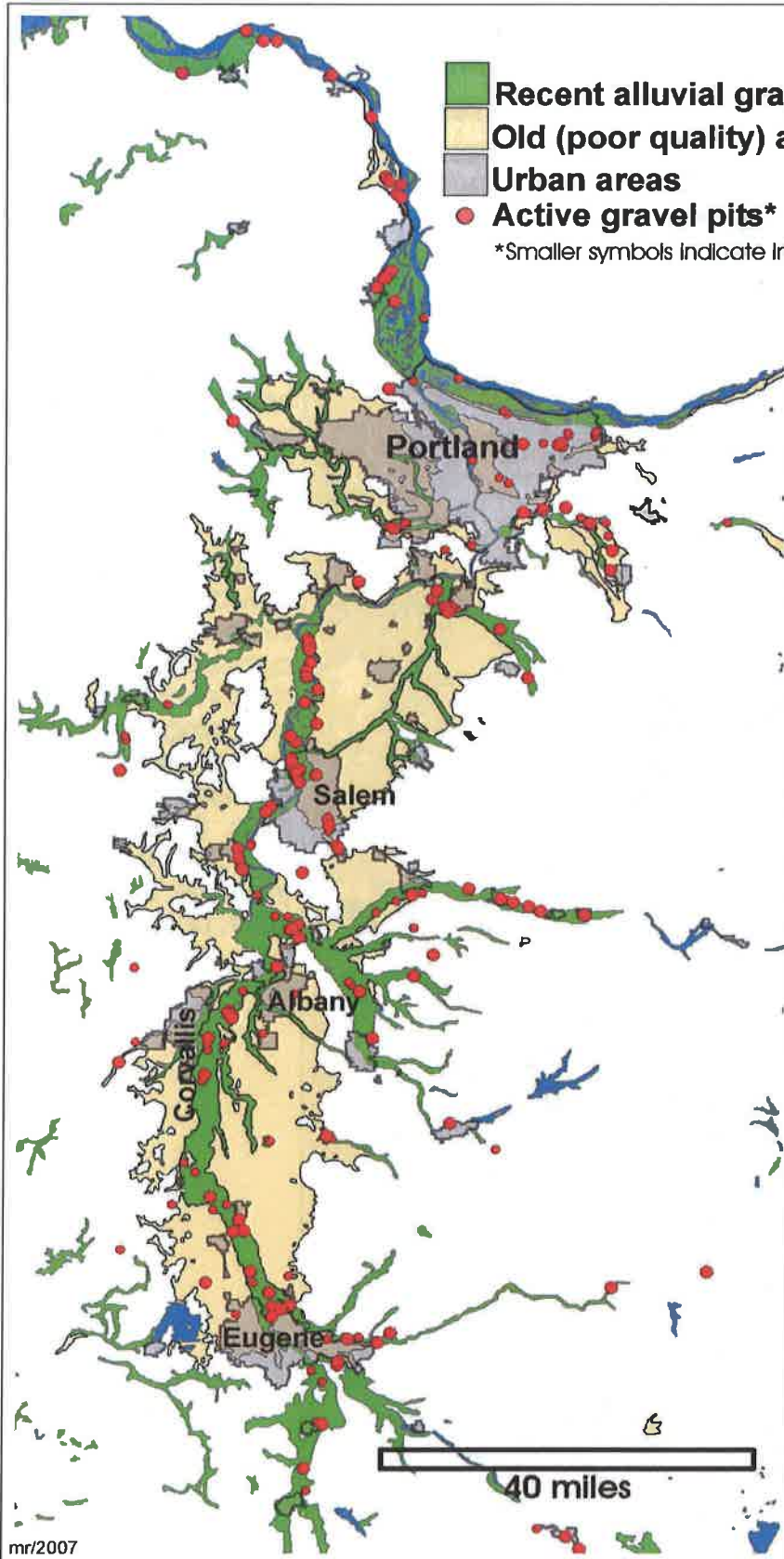
The obvious conclusion is that whether we mine sand and gravel or we mine basalt from quarries, the demand for rock determines employment, thus gravel mining does not increase employment.

In fact, *mining of valley-bottom gravel decreases total employment* because gravel mining destroys farmland and the livelihood of farm workers who work that land. The farming jobs are lost forever. Valley-bottom gravel mining eliminates the most labor-intensive farming in the state—farming of fruits, vegetables, nursery stock, and nuts on Class 1 and Class 2 soils. The lost jobs include those of farmers, laborers, and sales staff, plus the many who sell equipment and services to the farming operations. As Dr. Whitelaw's argument shows, the aggregate mining jobs will be there regardless of whether rock is mined from upland quarries or valley-bottom gravel pits.

The fundamental problem with HB 2666 is that it would eliminate the existing protection of farmland under Goal 5, which requires that new mining not cause significant change in farming practices and not cause significant increase in farming costs on adjacent farmland. Both of those criteria were the basis for the Lane County commission vote against the Eugene Sand and Gravel proposal. Both conservatives and liberals on the County Commission voted against the gravel mining proposal because they recognized the adverse impacts on farmers of dust, truck traffic, noise, and decreased ground water supply.

I urge you to stop HB 2666 and thereby preserve our dwindling supply of highly productive farm soils. What we really need is quite the opposite of HB 2666: better protection for Class 1 and Class 2 farm soils in the entire Willamette Valley.

# Willamette Valley Alluvial Gravel Pits

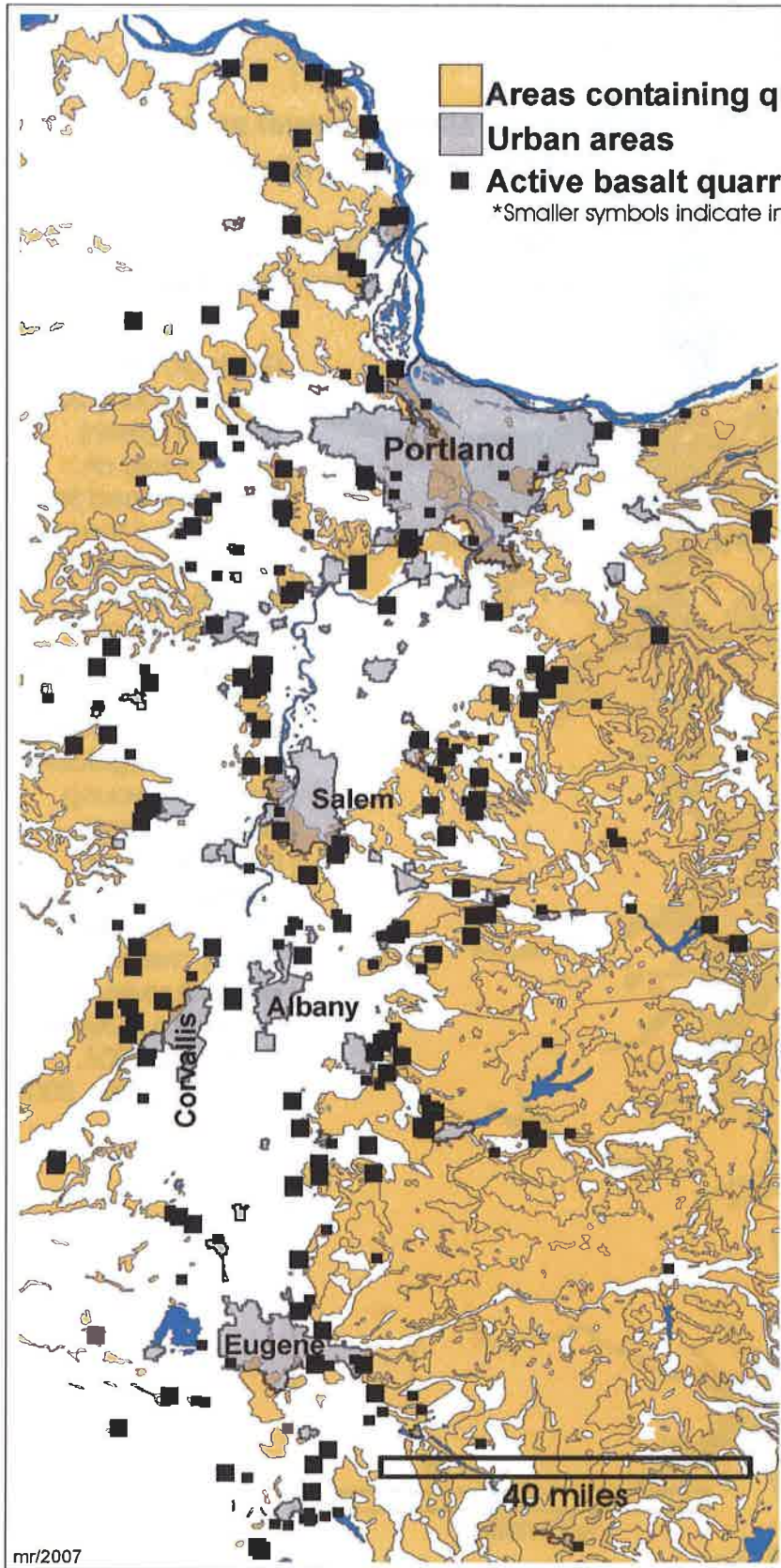


Geologic map showing young river alluvium (green) where nearly all gravel is mined (red circles) and showing older river alluvium (beige) that is generally poor in quality for aggregate. The best farming soils, used to grow fruits and vegetables, overlie the young alluvium (green). Generally lower quality farming soils, used for rye grass and wheat, overlie the older alluvium. (Mine data from DOGAMI (Marshall), 2006, 2007; Dugdale, 2007)

mr/2007

Figure 4

# Willamette Valley Basalt Formations and Quarries



Geologic map showing solid rock areas (tan) from which basalt is mined in numerous quarries (black squares).

Abundant basalt is readily available within the Valley, providing an inexpensive source of aggregate to meet demand without destroying the limited area of prime farmland along the rivers. (Mine data from DOGAMI (Marshall), 2006, 2007; Dugdale, 2007)

Figure 5