

MEMO

From: Mikey O'Connor ([mike@haven2.com](mailto:mike@haven2.com), 651-647-6109)

To: Buffalo County Board of Adjustments

RE: Truck traffic over Highway 88

Date: February 2, 2012

**Highway 88 does not meet current state or Federal highway standards**

An informal assessment (conducted by a civil engineer) that the road is below state/Federal standards was confirmed in conversation with DOT staff.

An easy way to tell which sections of road are substandard is to look for areas marked with "reduced speed", "Curve" and "Steep grade" signs. Residents have counted over 30 such sections along the 25-mile length of Highway 88 proposed as the sand haul route

Informal conversations with DOT staff indicate that upgrading the road to standard will likely be so expensive that it could never be cost-benefit justified. Just the project to upgrade the 2-mile Praag Valley Dugway section of 88 could cost \$10-15 million dollars, and would cause huge disruption to the local area both during construction and afterwards.

**Threatened or Endangered Species concerns**

88 runs immediately adjacent to a Class 3 trout stream

88 runs along several fragile wetlands and sedge meadows with a number of Wisconsin Rare Plant populations

**Cultural, Scenic, Habitat, Archeological or Historical Resources concerns**

88 runs within 50 feet Emmet Rutschou's house -- a possible historic building

88 runs in front of Mikey and Marcie O'Connor's farm -- which protects a number of Wisconsin Rare Plant species with a perpetual conservation easement to the West Wisconsin Land Trust

88 runs through the town of Cream -- a possible historic site

### **Groundwater, Wetland, Floodplain and Surface water concerns**

88 runs along fragile wetlands and sedge meadows -- with the attendant concerns about the impact of dust on native habitat and surface water.

### **Public safety concerns**

Buffalo County is a national hotspot for white tailed deer -- and 88 runs through the hot spot of the hot-spot. Local residents drive *\*very\** carefully along that road and insurance companies pay attention to the deer population in the area. Deer strikes are extremely common, during all seasons of the year.

88 is a school-bus route with over 30 sub-standard sections indicated with sharp-curve, blind corner, no-passing and reduced speed signs and markers. One single school-bus crash is one too many.

88 is considered a "low-collector" farm to market road by the DOT. It has zero controlled intersections and numerous blind entrances in the stretch that is being proposed for hauling.

The "Praag Valley Dugway" has steep drops of over 100 feet, narrow sub-standard blind corners, no guardrails, no shoulders or passing areas, and typically has one or two serious accidents (sometimes fatal) every year

88 is a favorite route for motorcyclists during the summer months - - unfortunately sometimes meeting with accidents on the Praag Valley dugway. There was a fatal crash on June 10, 2010.

88 is a is used to move farm equipment from place to place -- trucks will encounter combines, sprayers, large tractors and silage wagons during farming season.

Farmers like Warren Braem move cattle across a blind portion of 88. While there's a sign to indicate the crossing, trucks may back up behind the cows to the point that there is no room for the "last truck" to stop -- causing a chain reaction crash.

### **Negative Tax, Fiscal and Economic Municipal and resident concerns**

Much of the property value along the Praag Valley portion of 88 derives from the quiet beauty of the narrow twisting valley. Property owners are already indicating that they will sell if that is disturbed by high volume truck traffic. Experience with other mining operations is that property values along the haul route may drop 30% on average, perhaps more.

Local business owners have expressed concerns that their trade (much of which is based on tourism and outdoor sports activities) will be severely impacted, perhaps to the point of putting them out of business.

### **Any specific potential Public Nuisance concerns including dust, noise, traffic congestion, odor, blasting, drilling, light pollution and erosion.**

Several residents of the Praag Valley portion of 88 have expressed concerns about engine braking, especially on the steep turns leading off the Praag Valley Dugway.

Local residents have raised wind borne dust as a concern. Sources include blasting, uncovered sand piles, routine mining operations and uncovered (or partially-covered) truck traffic. Highway 88 runs through an extremely narrow valley, which will tend to concentrate the impact of truck dust. Impacts may be felt in fragile natural areas as well as residents' homes located close to the road.

## **Any specific work place and local resident safety health and financial concerns**

Conversations with DOT representatives confirm that the pavement on Highway 88 is in very poor condition -- largely because the road carries so little traffic that it's hard to justify repairs. Thus, if mine operations start running trucks over the road, it will have to be repaired almost immediately.

When pavement is repaired, there are no suitable detour routes and in many places no shoulders or passing areas, so the road will most likely have to be done in short sections with flagging, moving the work zone so that one lane is viable during the project. Thus it's likely that the project would be done in multiple phases. This will cause significant delays, considerable expense, and safety issues along the whole route and especially on the Praag Valley Dugway.

## **Proposals**

- **Condition: No haul routes across the Praag Valley Dugway on Highway 88**
- **Conduct studies to address these issues before entering into agreements with mine operators**
- **Ask mine applicants to pay for the studies, but put the selection of experts in the hands of the County.**
- **Establish formal mine agreements with mine operators**
- **Specifically address all of these issues in the mine agreements.**