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SAVE THE PINE BARRENS

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Protect our water, forests & communities

Stop unregulated strip mining!

PRESS RELEASE

April 20, 2022

A.D. Makepeace Co. strip mine in Plymouth challenged, water, forests threatened

- Largest earth removal operation in the region threatens water, forests, Indigenous Wampanoag sites
- Permit issued by Plymouth in 2014 expired, work illegal
- Makepeace claim that the earth removal is "necessary" solely to build bogs is another ruse according to group
- Wampanoag Native American cultural impacts ignored

In an [April 19, 2022 letter](#), [Save the Pine Barrens](#) asks the Town of Plymouth to enforce the zoning bylaw and a 2014 earth removal permit issued to A.D. Makepeace Co. The site is a 136-acre parcel in south Plymouth near the Wareham border. The group wants the 2014 permit revoked citing violations including excavating in the groundwater aquifer.

A.D. Makepeace Co., based in Wareham MA started work in 2014 on abutting bogs and has mined on about 50 acres of the 136-acre parcel. The site is off Tihonet Road on Makepeace's vast landholdings near [Myles Standish State Forest](#). The land is [globally rare pine barrens forest](#) with the state's highest ranking for endangered plants and animals. The area was [targeted by MassWildlife in 2009 for protection](#) but the agency has not followed through. The forests and sand and gravel Makepeace is stripping off filter the [Plymouth Carver Sole Source Aquifer](#) that is very vulnerable to contamination. The 199 square mile Aquifer is the sole source of drinking water for seven towns, including Plymouth. In some areas, the Aquifer is already polluted with industrial wastes.

The area is identified as having a ["strong potential for archeological resources"](#) according to a Makepeace report. For over a century, the cranberry industry in Southeastern Massachusetts has converted vast areas of the ancestral lands of the [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe](#) into bogs, diverting rivers and filling wetlands used for millennia by Indigenous peoples to hunt, fish, and gather. Archeological sites have been lost and thousands of years of history excavated and destroyed by converting land into cranberry bogs. Cranberry bog owners like A.D. Makepeace also conduct commercial sand and gravel mining claiming it is an agricultural use of the land. The 136-acre Makepeace strip mine site in Plymouth is one of the last undisturbed areas. The archeological review has been inadequate and lacked transparency.

The massive Plymouth earth removal operation is taking down hills as high as 100 feet. Makepeace claims this is necessary solely to build more cranberry bogs. "Makepeace has been making this [same claim to Carver to get earth removal permits](#). Yet, the company has not built the Carver bogs and has built only 11% of the Plymouth bogs since 2014. Massive amounts of earth are being extracted and sold including via Makepeace's "soil blending" operation, [Read Custom Soils](#)," said Meg Sheehan, volunteer attorney for the group. "Makepeace is not running a "cranberry" business but an industrial mining operation. How many times are local officials going to buy the cranberry bog story? Do they think the public is being fooled? We see [hundreds of trucks hauling](#) off the Pine Barrens [every day](#). The Makepeace Plymouth project involves about 370,000 truckloads of sand and gravel."

A local coalition is exposing the illegal and unregulated strip mining in the region and demanding accountability from local governments in Plymouth, Carver, and Wareham. "Earth removal" is regulated on the local level. Permits are expired and not enforced. [Drinking water, rivers, and wetlands are at risk](#). In Carver, conflicts of interest and self-dealing on the Earth Removal Committee involve current and former committee members [running their own mining operations](#) or businesses trucking sand for companies to which they grant earth removal permits. State regulators are ignoring the problem.

"[We only have one drinking water aquifer](#) and we need to protect it. Unregulated strip mining and extracting sand from the aquifer is one of the most reckless things we can do" said Sheehan.

[A.D. Makepeace](#) owns over 6,500 acres in the region and claims it is one of the largest landowners in the state and the largest cranberry grower in the world.

Numerous lawsuits and citizen initiatives are underway across the region. A lawsuit is pending against AD Makepeace in Wareham over a proposed mining operation for a 72-acre ground-mounted solar project that will strip mine about 2 million cubic yards on Tihonet Pond. Makepeace's illegal mining in Carver is being challenged under the state's [Citizen Suit Law](#). Residents abutting the [SLT mining operation](#) on Spring Street in [Carver have sued](#) to stop the expansion of that site around Rickard's Pond. At least seven wetlands appeals are pending at the state level over proposals by Carver cranberry operators to conduct earth removal in wetlands.

Contacts:

Meg Sheehan, Save the Pine Barrens
www.savethepinebarrens.org
environmentwatchesoutheasternma@gmail.com
c. 508.259.9154

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