**Week 20- Non-Metallic Mines**

**Conservation Corner**

***Conservation Corner is a regular article produced by the Forest County Land Conservation and Land Information Department. For more information contact Al Murray, County Conservationist-Land Information/GIS Director at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at*** ***lcc@co.forest.wi.us******.***

In the last few weeks I have been completing reviews of permitted non-metallic mines (otherwise known as gravel pits) across the County. In all, Forest County has 20 mines with reclamation permits. Reclamation permits are required under County ordinance for every mine where material is sold or utilized commercially. Mines utilized by the owner for use on their own lands or utilized only for municipal purposes are not required to have a permit. There are 34 additional non-metallic mines in Forest County which do not require a permit, with the US Forest Service operating 15 of those and remaining 19 operated by Towns, the County, companies and private landowners.

Each year permitted sites have the areas calculated utilizing GPS and the sites are reviewed for reclamation activities and potential issues that may affect reclamation. Area determinations are utilized to calculate the annual fees required for the mine to operate. These fees are based upon acreage with portions retained by the County and part of the fee paid to the State of Wisconsin.

The area is also required to calculate the amount of reclamation bond which the operator needs to maintain to insure that the mine area follows the reclamation plan. Bond amounts of $3,000 per acre are required to be maintained for each acre which is not reclaimed. The bonds, in the form of letters of credit, cash, or actual bonds from bonding companies are held by Forest County to insure appropriate reclamation of mine sites.

Reclamation of sites include water resource protections such as retention berms and silt fence to retain storm water in wetlands established with a site. Reclamation also includes leveling of sites to no more than a 3:1 slope and seeding and planting of sites to native vegetation to prevent and eliminate future erosion. Some sites have active reclamation on part of the mine as they become inactive, others wait to complete reclamation when all activity is complete.

If you know of commercial activity on non-metallic mines or if you have concerns with the operation of a non-metallic mine in your area, please contact our office. Actively monitoring non-metallic mines to insure proper reclamation is just another way that Forest County Land Conservation strives to maintain our water quality and our natural beauty for all to enjoy while providing for business opportunities and providing materials that we need everyday!