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[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Local](#) > Mine owner seeks to renew reclamation permit

# Mine owner seeks to renew reclamation permit

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As the state continues to pursue pollution complaints against Murdock Mine owner, Alpena Vision Resources, the company has asked the state to renew its mine reclamation permit for another five years. But Prairie Rivers Network and some Murdock-area residents have asked the state to deny the permit.

**MURDOCK** — As the state continues to pursue pollution complaints against Murdock Mine owner, Alpena Vision Resources, the company has asked the state to renew its mine reclamation permit for another five years.

But Prairie Rivers Network and some Murdock-area residents have asked the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to deny the permit, calling the site a money-making venture rather than a mine reclamation operation.

Traci Barkley, water resources scientist with Prairie Rivers, told state officials during a public hearing earlier this week that "the mine has been used to generate revenue while Alpena ostensibly performs reclamation."

Alpena officials did not return phone calls on Friday seeking comment.

Prairie Rivers requested a public hearing on the permit renewal, and about a dozen Murdock area residents attended the Monday night meeting, along with Prairie Rivers officials, to give state officials their comments for the record.

Chris McCloud, spokesman with the Natural Resources, which issues mining permits, said the department is evaluating the renewal application submitted by Alpena and information in its own records. He said the department is considering all the comments received from the public. McCloud said the current permit expires on June 23, so a decision will be made on or before that date.

According to Barkley, this would be the sixth five-year renewal of the mine reclamation permit for the former Murdock mine, which is in Douglas County, immediately east of the small town of Murdock and about a dozen miles east of Tuscola.

The mine, which hasn't operated as a coal mine for more than 25 years, was once owned by Old Ben Coal Co. and Ziegler Coal Co. Alpena Vision Resources, which is not a mining company, bought the site and took over the reclamation process, which has been ongoing for more than 20

years.

In recent years, Alpena had been accepting, and getting paid to accept, various materials as fill and cover, including lime sludge from the Decatur and Danville water-treatment plants; sludge from the Urbana Champaign Sanitary District; and gypsum, a lactic-acid byproduct, from Archer Daniels Midland Co., in addition to other types of materials, such as fly ash.

For several years, area residents complained of strong odors and thick dust coming from the site, and last fall, the Illinois attorney general's office filed a complaint with the Illinois Pollution Control Board alleging water and air pollution at the site, and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency also issued the owners violation notices. The agency had issued Alpena permits to dispose of the various types of materials at the former mine site, but issued the violation notices, alleging improper handling and disposal of those materials. Since the fall, the state has halted delivery of those materials.

Alpena also has a federal permit to discharge acid-mine drainage from the site into a tributary of the Brushy Fork, and according to the complaint filed by the attorney general's office, Alpena stockpiled and stored delivered materials in ways that created a water pollution hazard.

Barkley, of Prairie Rivers, said Alpena has made a lot of money off of the Murdock site, more than \$3 million in the acceptance of and disposal of the various waste products.

And Alpena is now trying to market the fine coal refuse on the site, according to officials from Natural Resources, and would need the renewed mining permit to do that.

In a town hall meeting organized by Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, about two weeks ago, Scott Fowler of Natural Resources said new uses are emerging for the leftover fine coal refuse, which was considered just waste in the past. He said Alpena officials are trying to market that product now and have hopes of selling it to a utility in southern Illinois this summer. He added that the refuse must be out to fully reclaim the site.

But Barkley said that's more of the company's money-making scheme rather than a pure reclamation plan.

"If it were really about the reclamation, they would take the carbon (fine coal refuse) on site and fill the (slurry) impoundment with that," she said. "They're trying to squeeze the site for as much money as they can."

Barkley said they have asked to deny the permit for multiple reasons.

First are the pollution complaints and violation notices, Barkley said, but second is the question whether Alpena is in compliance with reclamation standards by using other industrial waste and by-product materials to fill the coal-waste slurry impoundment on the site.

"IDNR maintains that (the materials) are being used in a beneficial way to neutralize the acidic mining conditions, but we say it's not enough to consider neutralizing the pH, you must consider the other pollution possibilities that come along with those other products," she said.

Third, Barkley said, the site has only one surface-water monitoring location, one groundwater monitoring location and even though the state says its inspects the site, there is very little

monitoring and data collection to make sure the site is in compliance.

At the town hall meeting, Natural Resources officials reported that quarterly sampling from the sole groundwater monitoring well, which is to the southwest, down gradient corner of the mining site, have all been in compliance.

## Public comments

The public hearing on Alpena Vision Resources Murdock Mine reclamation permit was held May 20, but written comments can still be submitted to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources through May 30, according to department officials.

Comments should be sent to Scott Fowler's attention:

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Office of Mines and Minerals, Land Reclamation Division

One Natural Resources Way,

Springfield, IL 62702-1271

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Sections (2): [News](#) [2], [Local](#) [3]

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Topics (2): [Environment](#) [4], [Politics and Government](#) [5]

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