

# Delays with permitting threaten DuPont mine

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Glacier Northwest Permit Manager Peter Stoltz knows all about things moving at glacial speeds. Not only does he understand the formation of local soil that was created by the large, slow moving sheets of ice receding from the last Ice Age, but he has also been shepherding the permitting process for a mine expansion that was expected to only take six months to clear. The process is entering its fifth year.

Costs have jumped with each delay – the bill thus far is \$500,000. And the clock is ticking as the current mining site at the 335-acre Glacier Northwest-Pioneer Aggregate mine enters its final years of operation. Glacier estimates the remaining life of the currently permitted mine is between 6 and 10 years, depending on market conditions.

“We have some wiggle room,” Stoltz said, “but we need that material. There is more urgency every day.”

Glacier Northwest officials want to expand the company’s mining operations to a 200-acre site just east of its current mine along the shoreline of Puget Sound, near the border between Pierce and Thurston County. The land is needed to continue the rock and sand mining operations in DuPont as the current facility winds down its operation.

The actual date of when the mine will close depends on market forces and demand for the rocks and sand. But that date is coming sooner rather than later, if the expansion plans die. The expansion would add about another 30 to 40 million tons of sand and gravel, translated to 14



Glacier Northwest-Pioneer Aggregate’s mine in DuPont shuttles a small percentage of its gravel and soil to construction sites by truck. More than 80 percent of the material leaves the mine by barge.

years of life for the DuPont mine. Another 200 acres north of the site could further add to the mine’s operational life, but plans for that site have not been decided. That makes the current expansion more critical.

The permit process for the proposed mine expansion started in 2002, five years after Glacier, which was formerly named Lone Star Northwest, took over the DuPont mine. The site employs about 100 people and has been in operation for 20 years. Officials had hoped to have the expansion permits cleared within a year, so they could have the expansion plans ready to go when they needed to move opera-

tions into the new area. It involves work encompassing Sequelitchew Creek and includes significant environmental review.

“We wanted to make sure we answered all the questions,” Stoltz said. “There are some complexities. There is no doubt about that.”

The process has taken a bit longer than first predicted, since the plan calls for a rechanneling of the creek’s northern tributary and the draining of a wetland that is commonly called Edwards Marsh. The Environmental Impact Statement is still under review and now faces another round of review after the City of DuPont called for an independent consultant to

## Glacier Northwest

The proposed expansion of the gravel and sand mine in DuPont might not seem to affect many people or businesses outside the South Sound city. That assumption would be wrong. Most of the 6 million tons of material taken from the mine each year is barged to construction sites around the state. The sand and gravel was used for the new Tacoma Narrows Bridge, Sound Transit’s rail expansion, improvements to Interstate 520 and other transportation projects that impact the region.

review the plans before the municipality would decide on the permitting issue.

DuPont officials hope to have a consultant reviewing the documents by the end of the month as a way to make sure all questions are answered and that nothing was overlooked.

“It’s much like what an auditor does,” DuPont’s Community Development Director John Darling said. “It conceivably could be done June 1 and we can go from there.”

Darling says that, although the expansion plan is complex, he doubts another review will raise new issues that the permit process will have to address. The review will likely cost the city about \$15,000 to answer what Darling characterized as 5 percent factual clarifications in the environmental report and 95 percent political tactics by environmental activists and local naturalists who don’t want the mine to expand.

“There has already been five years of work on it, and there has been a lot of give and take,” he said. “It’s not like it just parachuted in.” **BE**