

Court denies expansion of Lamoine gravel pit

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A cross that has stood on a Lamoine hilltop since 1995 is visible above the surrounding trees in November 2012.

A contentious, seven-year dispute over whether a local contracting firm should be able to expand a gravel-mining site in Lamoine appears to be over after the state supreme court denied the firm's application for a permit.

In a decision released last week, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court ruled in favor of Friends of Lamoine, a group organized to stop Harold MacQuinn Inc., from expanding a 65-acre gravel pit to 108 acres. MacQuinn had appealed a lower-court's decision to halt the project, but the supreme court ultimately found that town officials had conducted a proper review of the site before denying the expansion, among other things.

Gravel mining operations have long been a contentious issue in Lamoine, where several gravel pits have been in operation for decades. More recently, some residents have raised concerns about the impact the pits have had on Lamoine's groundwater and quality of life.

The court decision reflects a growing interest among many residents to limit the impact gravel mining has on the town as well as

changes voters have made in recent years to the town's land-use ordinances, Carol Korty, president of Friends of Lamoine, said. Entire hills have been removed over the decades, she said, and the noise and number of gravel trucks traveling through Lamoine adversely affects people out along local roads and in nearby homes.

"It is a full-blown industry" in Lamoine, Korty said, adding that three other companies besides MacQuinn have active gravel pits in town. "They are hauling off a non-renewable resource six days a week."

The group is pleased with the court decision and is optimistic that it will help strike a better balance between limited local gravel pit operations and Lamoine's otherwise quiet and rural character, Korty said.

Attempts to contact Mac-Quinn's attorney, Edmond Bearor, who has represented the company throughout the legal dispute, were unsuccessful.

The long legal battle bounced around between Lamoine's planning board, its municipal appeals board, Hancock County Superior Court and the state Business and Consumer Court for several years, after the company first applied to the town in 2012 to expand the Kittredge Pit on Route 184. The planning board rejected the application in 2014, but the proposal was held in limbo as subsequent appeals, first by MacQuinn and then the Friends group, reversed previous decisions and remanded the matter back to lower deliberative bodies before it finally culminated in the state supreme court decision last week.