

WNBZ
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Organizations to host discussion on road salt alternatives

As communities continue to call for alternatives to the use of road salt on Adirondack roadways, members of several regional organizations are planning a meeting later this month to address what they're deeming a – quote – “growing problem.”

The discussion is scheduled for 10 a.m. May 17 at Paul Smith's College and is being hosted by AdkAction.org and the Adirondack Council.

In a release issued last week, organizers say they want to initiate a discussion on “ways to solve the growing problem of winter road salt damage in the Adirondack Park.”

The scheduled meeting follows the release of two studies highlighting the economic and environmental damage incurred as a result of current winter road maintenance procedures.

The latest study, penned by the Adirondack Watershed Institute and sponsored by AdkAction.org, reports on specific costs and damage assessments relating to salt use. The study – which was authored primarily by AWI Executive Director Dan Kelting – also makes suggestions for alternative practices.

Brian Houseal is executive director of the Adirondack Council.

“All of the data and recommendations we have collected and published will go to waste if we don't get them into the hands of the folks who handle the day-to-day decisions for road maintenance in the Adirondacks,” he said.

“This meeting will give us a chance to share what we have learned with state and local officials,” Houseal added. “It will also give us a chance to ask what we can do as advocacy organizations to help them. We don't want these important studies to die on a storage shelf somewhere.”

Houseal expects representatives from both the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Transportation to attend the May 17 meeting.

According to evidence compiled in both studies, the Adirondack Park could reduce in-park salt damage by some 50 percent with alternative practices.

AdkAction.org chair Lee Keet notes alternative approaches would not involve an increase in long-term cost – and, more importantly, it would not sacrifice public safety.

Keet says some of the advanced technologies implemented in other areas of the country have paid for themselves within the first year of use.

“The long-term versus short-term issues loom large, however, as changed practices would most certainly include upgraded equipment and training, an up-front cost that, while justified, would stretch New York’s already fragile finances,” Keet said.

“Regardless of the long-term benefits and cost reductions, creative thinking is needed on how to finance the pay-back period and sell the necessary policy makers and politicians on its merits,” he added.

Seating at the conference is limited and is being reserved for state agencies, advocacy groups, lake associations and other qualified participants.

Anyone wishing to attend should request an invitation by contacting Keet at lee@adkaction.org

-Chris Morris, 5-4-10