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Winter road salt damage focus of meeting

Studies say impact can be reduced

BY STEPHEN WILLIAMS Gazette Reporter

Two environmental groups want to discuss things that can be done to reduce winter road salt damage along roads in the Adirondack Park.

AdkAction.org and the Adirondack Council will sponsor a meeting at Paul Smith's College in Paul Smiths at 10 a.m. May 17, and have invited state and local agencies involved in winter road maintenance.

Two recent studies underwritten by conference sponsors have documented the damage done by current winter road maintenance procedures, including the spreading of sodium chloride to melt ice and snow, the sponsors said.

A study by the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smiths concluded it is possible to dramatically reduce the environmental impact of winter road treatment without increasing costs or reducing safety, said Dan Kelting, executive director of the institute.

The study found high chloride levels in a number of lakes near highways, including Cascade Lake along Route 73 near the High Peaks and Lake Colby, outside the village of Saranac Lake. High salt levels can harm plants, fish and wildlife.

"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-today decisions for road maintenance in the Adirondacks," said Brian L. Houseal, executive director of the Adirondack Council. "This meeting will give us a chance to share what we have learned with state and local officials."

Representatives from local, county and state government, including the Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Transportation, as well as environmental and landowner associations, have been invited to attend.

The goal will be to see if an inter-organizational task force can be assembled to tackle the specifics.

Evidence suggests that salt damage in the Adirondack Park could be reduced by 50 percent or more with changed practices, at no increase in long-term cost or reduction in safety, said Lee Keet, chairman of the AdkAction.org water quality committee.

“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.

A summary of the findings of the Adirondack Watershed Institute study can be found at www.adkaction.org. The Adirondack Council’s Low Salt Diet publication is on its website at www.adirondackcouncil.org.