TWO RECENT STUDIES CONFIRM ROAD SALT DAMAGE TO DRINKING WATER, VEGETATION & WILDLIFE HABITAT

One Year after Adirondack Council Recommends "Low Sodium Diet" for Park Roads
Paul Smith's College/Adk Action.org and University of Maine Reach Similar Conclusions

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ALBANY, N.Y. – The Adirondack Council today joined with AdkAction.org and the Adirondack Watershed Institute to urge three state agencies to create a "salt sensitivity map" of the Adirondack Park to identify specific places where drinking water, important plants and wildlife habitat are endangered by excessive use of road salt.

The map is just one of the recommendations of a new study on road salt damage conducted by the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smith's College, and underwritten by AdkAction.org. The new report is the third major study released in the past year that calls for changes in the way government road crews de-ice highways. All three urge more effort to halt water pollution, loss of native plants and wildlife, and damage to roads, bridges, vehicles and buildings.

"We think the water, plants and wildlife of the Adirondack Park deserve special treatment from roads crews to protect them from harm," said **Daniel Kelting, Executive Director of the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smith's College**. "Creating an official salt-sensitivity map is the logical first step toward better protections."

"AdkAction is proud to support this outstanding research effort by the Watershed Institute," said **Lee Keet, chair of the water quality committee of AdkAction.org**. "We will work with the Adirondack Council and others to gain attention for it and to promote the need for the salt-sensitivity map. It is our hope that there will be a salt-sensitivity map for the whole state one day. This is the right place to start."

The two previous studies were issued by the Adirondack Council in February 2009 and the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine in February 2010.

"We agree that New York needs a map identifying the places where special care should be taken with road salt. We will work to make that happen," said Brian L. Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council. "Our 2009 report *Low Sodium Diet: Curbing New York's Appetite for Road Salt* called on state and local officials to make changes to the way their road crews store and use road salt, sand and other de-icing chemicals." It is available at www.adirondackcouncil.org.

The Paul Smith's/AdkAction.org Report, released last week, is entitled *Review of Effects and Costs of Road De-icing with Recommendations for Winter Road Management in the Adirondack Park*. A copy of the report is available at www.adkaction.org/Salt.pdf and printed copies have been mailed to the press. The new study is based on peer-reviewed scientific literature. Many of the innovative methods it suggests be adopted have proven to pay for themselves in less than a year when used in other states.

The University of Maine report, issued in February 2010, is *Maine Winter Roads: Salt, Safety, Environment and Cost*. It is available at http://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/files/pdf/Winter Road Maint Final.pdf.

“All three reports take the realistic point of view that we cannot just stop using road salt tomorrow,” explained Houseal. “But all three also contain clear warnings that we need to start protecting our most sensitive places now, while we are working on new ways to replace road salt entirely with a more effective and benign alternative.

All three reports offer a good snapshot of the techniques employed to keep roads clear of snow and ice in the Northeast. They compare the relative advantages/disadvantages of a variety of alternatives. All three reports question whether all roads should be cleared of all snow at all times. All three show that chlorine and sodium contamination are degrading water quality, killing native plants, eroding roads and bridges, damaging wildlife habitat and ushering in a wave of invasive, non-native plants, animals and insects that are more resistant to salt than native species.

Both the Paul Smith’s/AdkAction.org report and Adirondack Council report also urge New York State to invest in a sophisticated network of weather monitoring equipment that will assist local and state road crews in determining the best timing for applying de-icing agents prior to a storm. This technique has been proven to reduce the overall need and consumption of road salt.

The new report recommends that the NYS Department of Transportation and Department of Environmental Conservation work with the Adirondack Park Agency to create a salt sensitivity map for the Adirondack Park. The map would provide guidance to road crews on where to apply alternative icing procedures.

In addition to the map, the new report also promotes the use of traffic patterns to prioritize snow-clearing efforts and to do less clearing of low speed, smaller roads. Lastly, the report focuses on having highly trained drivers that know when, what, and how much salt to use on the road. These trained drivers would be matched with a recording system that marks how much they use, where they use it, and the impact it has on safety.

“While many of these alternatives may cost more upfront, they can mitigate many of the long term environmental and infrastructure costs that we face with continued overuse of salt,” Houseal said.

As part of the proposed 2010-11 budget, New York Department of Transportation has announced that it is looking to reduce salt usage by computing the amount of salt used by each driver and examining if over-salting is occurring by some staff. Such techniques could save the state many millions of dollars in reduced salt consumption.

The University of Maine recommends investing in porous asphalt that would allow deicing chemicals to soak through to collection pools underneath the roads, instead of running into lakes, rivers and streams.

Founded in 1975, the Adirondack Council is a leading environmental research, education and advocacy organization with members in all 50 United States. Its mission is to ensure the wild character and ecological integrity of New York’s 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. The Council is privately funded. It neither solicits nor accepts donations from government agencies or any other taxpayer-supported sources.