



Memorandum of Support

July 13, 2020

A.8767-A (Jones)/S.8663-A (Kennedy)

Title: An act to establish the Adirondack road salt reduction task force, pilot plan, and test program.

Statement of Support: In the Adirondacks, clean water is essential to many facets of life. The awe-inspiring region's surface waters play an imperative role in supporting recreation and tourism, maintaining aquatic ecosystems, and providing drinking water to residents and visitors alike. In recent years, the excessive application of road salt (sodium chloride) to clear ice and snow from roads in the wintertime has contaminated surface waters and drinking water wells at an alarming rate. Due to its low cost and ease of access, road salt has been the most commonly used de-icing chemical for decades, with New York State using the most nationwide.

A study of 500 wells across the Adirondacks, conducted by the Adirondack Watershed Institute of Paul Smith's College, revealed that more than half of the private wells exceeded safe sodium levels and over a quarter exceeded chloride guidelines.¹ A 2013 peer-reviewed study found that 84% of the chloride buildup in Adirondack surface waters could be directly attributed to New York State's use of road salt.²

In addition to posing risks to humans through impairing drinking water quality, road salt also impacts roadside vegetation, soils, aquatic life, and water bodies. Mirror Lake, located in the Village of Lake Placid, is facing serious threats from road salt runoff. A 2014 report released by the Adirondack Lake Assessment Program (ALAP) concluded that Mirror Lake had a surface water chloride concentration roughly 160 times higher than Adirondack lakes without paved roads in their watershed, making the Lake one of the saltiest in the Adirondacks.³ This excess salt has interfered with the physical processes occurring in the lake. Mixing, or turnover, is an important natural process that replenishes oxygen and nutrients throughout the water column. In the spring of 2017, Mirror Lake did not mix as a result of higher salt concentrations at the lake bottom. Annual spring mixing is critical for the survival of many cold-water fish species including the native Lake Trout, and low oxygen levels in the lake bottom also threaten zooplankton and other organisms that are essential to lake ecosystems. Mirror Lake is a treasure of the Village of Lake Placid, serving as a hub for many recreational activities.

¹ <https://www.adkwatershed.org/https%3A/www.adkwatershed.org/research/road-salt>

² https://www.adkwatershed.org/sites/default/files/kelting_et_al_2012.pdf

³ <https://www.ausableriver.org/blog/road-salt-prevents-turnover-mirror-lake>

The inundation of road salt runoff prevents natural water turnover and poses a serious risk to both the balance of its ecology and local tourism.

Unnecessary road salt application costs the state millions of dollars each year, and jeopardizes safe drinking water and ecosystems. New York must reduce overall road salt application as part of a modernized road management plan. This legislation would create an Adirondack Road Salt Reduction Task Force aimed at developing a strategic approach to reduce excess road salt usage, ensure clean water, and maintain safe roadways. The three year pilot study would explore new technologies to deal with winter weather such as segmented plow blades conforming to the road surface; varying salt application rates and times for best results; cutting back trees or limbs to allow sunlight onto the roads where legal and appropriate; monitoring road conditions with cameras; and reducing speed limits in winter. Addressing road salt pollution will safeguard public health by protecting drinking water wells, protect scenic natural lands and waters for current and future generations, and support the native habitats and species that make the Adirondacks so uniquely remarkable.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Urges Your Support of A.8767-A/S.8663-A