



**Testimony of the Adirondack Council at the  
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the Transportation  
Portion of the Executive Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2024-2025**

January 24, 2024

Greetings Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Chair Kennedy, Chair Magnarelli and honored legislators. My name is Kevin Chlad, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Adirondack Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the public hearing today on an issue of critical public and environmental health facing the Adirondack Park and North Country.

The Adirondack Council is a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park. We do not accept any state grants. We envision an Adirondack Park with clean air and water, large ‘forever wild’ wilderness areas, working forests and farms, and vibrant, safe, inclusive communities.

We offer the following testimony in response to the transportation portion of the Governor’s Executive Budget proposal for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

**Road Salt Use: By the Numbers**

With New York State facing a more than \$4 billion budget gap, and even larger budget gaps in out-year projections, the Adirondack Council would like to highlight a costly, even wasteful, expense in New York’s Budget: road salt. Before we explore this further, we must be clear: The Adirondack Council supports efforts to maintain safe winter road conditions for public transportation. People require safe roadways in the winter months to commute to work, to ride the bus to school, to operate emergency response vehicles, and more. With our headquarters in Elizabethtown and staff spread across the Adirondacks who often commute long distances, we’ll be the first to state that no efforts to reduce road salt use should come at the expense of public safety.

**The Adirondack Council has reviewed the New York State Office of General Services State Contract Award Notices for Road Salt, Treated Salt, and Emergency Standby Road Salt for Fiscal Year 2023-24. In our review, we found that the state, counties, towns, villages and schools will spend a minimum of \$111,038,662.30, and could spend as much as \$390,781,794.57 on road salt for this winter. These astronomical numbers exclude all private expenses on road salt.**

According to a study conducted by the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smiths College, the Adirondack Park contains 10,555 lane-miles of roads, with each mile of a two-lane highway consisting of

two lane-miles. The Department of Transportation manages more than 42,500 lane-miles of roads statewide. Back in the Adirondacks, State roads comprise 27% of the Park's lane-miles, while local roads comprise the other 73%. **Though state roads comprise roughly one quarter of the lane-miles in the Park, they receive more than half of the road salt applied in the Park each year. Since the 1980 Winter Olympics, enough road salt has been applied to each lane-mile of Adirondack roadway to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Once salt has been applied, it ultimately ends up somewhere else in the form of runoff.**

Ideally, every ounce of salt would serve its intended purpose of keeping our driving public safe in winter. Unfortunately, in the absence of best management practices, this is not always the case. **When road salt is spread, research has shown that as much as 50 percent of the material can be lost due to bouncing or blowing off the roadway being treated.** Salt can be transported dozens of feet from the road, with most falling within 65 feet. If road salt is pre-wetted, this loss can largely be mitigated, and much of the material will remain on the road. Fully functioning equipment and speed of spreading are key factors in determining the efficacy of the salt that is applied. Poorly planned use of road salt can prove to be a great waste of taxpayer dollars.

Additional research from the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smiths College reported that runoff from paved roads in the Adirondack Park enters more than 6,000 miles of Adirondack streams, more than 820 lakes, and likely a substantial portion of Adirondack groundwater. The most recent research conducted by the Adirondack Watershed Institute and partners found that in testing more than 400 private drinking wells in the Adirondack Park, **sodium levels in more than half of the wells receiving state road salt runoff exceeded water quality guidelines (20mg/L). One in four wells that receive state road runoff exceeded the water quality guidelines for chloride (250mg/L).** In humans, the Center for Disease Control cites a strong, direct association between higher sodium intake levels and high blood pressure. Hyperchloremia (high chloride levels in the blood) can cause kidney damage. These health conditions have quality of life impacts, as well as associated healthcare costs that affect New Yorker's wallets.

In connection with the health impacts derived from road salt runoff, impacted homeowners have sought legal remedies for their polluted drinking water wells. The Department of Transportation has funded the drilling of new drinking water wells for homeowners who faced increasing salinity, but in some cases, the new well became salty with time. Millions of state dollars have been invested in the north country over the last decade to extend drinking water lines to homes with wells that were polluted by road salt runoff. **Currently, the NYS Department of Transportation faces more than \$8 billion in tort liability. There is no question that the state must continue to manage for this liability, but please do not overlook the emerging liability derived from homeowners who are finding that their dishwashers are rusting and their health is imperiled as a direct result of their wells being polluted by salt runoff from state roadways.**

In addition to costs associated with the health impacts tied to polluted waters, **road salt imposes a hidden tax on New Yorkers in the form of corrosion.** Salt is an extremely potent oxidizer, corroding motor vehicles, bridges, blacktop, concrete and more. Since the 1970's, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has ordered the recall of millions of vehicles of nearly every popular make, due to corrosion-related factors. Millions of steel-belted radial tires have been recalled for similar reasons. A 1992 study, which would undoubtedly be conservative compared to current estimates, found that bridge maintenance expenditures could equate to an additional cost of \$332 per ton of salt applied, with significantly higher figures in states like New York. **According to Author Jonathan Waldman's book**

**“Rust: The Longest War,” corrosion is costlier than all other natural disasters combined, amounting to 3 percent of Gross Domestic Product nationwide, or \$437 billion annually. That averages out to about \$1500 per person every year. New Yorkers are, no doubt, on the higher end of that average.**

The Governor’s state operations budget proposal for fiscal year 2024-25 includes \$151,965,000 for the Department of Transportation to spend on supplies and materials, “[f]or the payment of costs of snow and ice control on state highways and preventive maintenance on state roads and bridges as defined in paragraph (a) of subdivision 1 of section 10-d of the highway law.” (line 55 of page 655, FY ’25 State Operations Budget S.8300/A.8800) **Given the budget hurdles we face this year as New Yorkers, this is an important time to discuss meaningful road salt reduction strategies, so that we use only what we need, thereby reducing waste and the hidden tax imposed on New Yorkers.**

### **The Adirondack Park Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report Recommendations: The Time for Action is Now!**

The State released its long-awaited Adirondack Park Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report in September of last year, providing an assessment of the scope and scale of road salt pollution impacts in the Adirondack Park region, as well as a menu of solutions that state and local road managers can take to reduce road salt pollution while maintaining safe roadways. **It is important to note that the road salt reduction strategies proposed in the report provide a pathway for *all of New York* to reduce road salt use, not just the Adirondacks.**

It is a hard truth that there is no clear replacement for road salt, but significant reductions can be achieved through the implementation of the seven primary task force recommendations:

1. Scale up well-known snow and ice removal practices that reduce overall salt use while maintaining current levels of service for the driving public;
2. Establish and carry out uniform best management practice training for winter road managers statewide, and consider advancing legislation to limit liability for road managers when best management practices are followed. Similar legislation has been approved in other states.
3. Adopt water quality standards for chloride and sodium, and implement road salt reduction targets;
4. Expand existing funding for salt reduction programs and implement a “return on investment” approach to scale up the deployment of modern low-salt equipment;
5. Track salt applications at state, local and private levels, collect a robust water quality data set, and make data on its use publicly accessible;
6. Establish a process for remediating the contamination of residential drinking water.
7. Create an outreach and awareness campaign to strengthen public understanding of salt use and its risks to the environment and human health;

Though not included in the final version of the 2023 report, a number of task force members, along with a coalition of salt reduction advocates, recommend that the state implement the following measures at the same time:

- **Establish a framework for accountability:** (1) Pass legislation establishing a statewide interagency council and advisory committee, following the model set forth by the New York State Invasive Species Council and Advisory Committee, to serve as a dedicated body guiding the implementation of the Task Force Report’s recommendations. (2) Create a dedicated “salt czar” staff position in the Governor’s office to lend support and accountability for the Council, DOT and partnering agencies, for such an interconnected and complex issue.
- **Develop an action and implementation plan for report recommendations:** For the next six years (2024 - 2030), there are *immediate* and *sustained long-term* efforts that will be necessary to make progress implementing Task Force recommendations. Currently, no timeline exists for the fulfillment of report recommendations, including salt-reduction targets. The earliest phases of the road salt reduction pilots are now underway, but at the same time, a broader and more robust plan for future seasons must be developed in the next ten months in preparation for the next winter season (2024-2025). This kind of effective, pragmatic planning takes time and must begin soon.
- **Fund salt reductions using savings:** Salt is a very expensive product, and salt use reductions will alleviate pressures on state and local budgets while reducing pollution.

### **The Town of Hague, A Model for Sustainable Salt Use and Best Management Practices**

Is road salt reduction possible under current budget constraints? Yes! Proof can be found in many Adirondack communities, but especially in the Town of Hague, nestled in the Lake George basin. Eight years ago, the Town of Hague embarked in an effort to reduce road salt use, working with partners such as the Lake George Association, ADK Action, and WiT Advisors. They measured every pound of salt applied, calibrated their equipment, installed GPS tracking on their trucks and mounted cameras to monitor road conditions in real time. They acquired “live edge” plows, brine tanks, and trained in best management practices. They became low-salt winter road maintenance experts. **As a result of their efforts, the Town of Hague has been able to reduce their winter road maintenance budget by more than fifty percent, without reducing driver take-home pay. They provide the same level of service on their roadways, and have significantly reduced road salt pollution in their community!**

The Adirondack Park Road Salt Reduction Task Force Report offers a path for the state Department of Transportation to take in reducing road salt pollution statewide. This should save state dollars in the years to come, if done right. The model established by the Town of Hague can be scaled to meet the needs of the traveling public across our state if we commit ourselves to the cause.

Kevin Chlad  
 Director of Government Relations  
 Adirondack Council  
[www.AdirondackCouncil.org](http://www.AdirondackCouncil.org)  
[kchlad@adirondackcouncil.org](mailto:kchlad@adirondackcouncil.org)  
 Cell: 518-937-3844