

# Lake Shore Towns Join Effort to Put Lake on Low Salt Diet

By Anthony F. Hall

The New Year arrived in the Town of Bolton with a wave of storms that left a foot of snow, tundra-like temperatures, sleet, rain and, before the storms withdrew, black ice on the roads as well as the lake.

The New Year also began with a new highway superintendent and a new policy of reducing the town's use of road salt and experimenting with a greener alternative known as Clear Lane.

"Although it's early in the year, Clear Lane looks like it will be as effective as rock salt in keeping the roads safe," said Bill Sherman, the newly elected highway superintendent. "Although more expensive than rock salt, we've been assured that in the long run, it will also be cost effective. And it's better for the lake. We've just ordered another two tons of it."

After a few years of using Magic Salt, another de-icing substitute, Lake George Village has found that it's actually more effective than rock salt, said Mayor Bob Blais.



"It lasts longer, and we use less of it," said Blais.

Walt Lender, the executive director of the Lake George Association, said he has meetings scheduled with Ticonderoga's Supervisor and Highway Superintendent to discuss the feasibility of using a salt substitute on town roads that border the lake.

"We'd like the town to consider using substitutes on Black Point Road and Baldwin Road, two roads that are well-suited for an experiment. Because they're not heavily used in winter, we could test the effectiveness of substitutes without inconveniencing drivers. And of all the roads in town, they're the closest to the lake," said Lender.

The Town of Lake George is

now considering switching to a salt substitute, said Supervisor Dennis Dickinson.

"Reducing the amount of salt entering the lake has become a priority for everyone, and we want to be a part of it," said Dickinson.

According to Bolton Supervisor Ron Conover, his town is also looking at new equipment that will enable its trucks to spread de-icing agents more efficiently and cost-effectively.

"Even small changes in spreading practices can have a huge impact on salt use," said Beth Gilles of the Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board, which hosted a "Municipal De-Icing Best Practice Forum" for local Highway Superintendents and crews last spring.

Highway Superintendents and staff from 21 municipalities attended, as did state Transportation Department employees from Warren, Washington, Clinton, Essex and Hamilton Counties.

"We couldn't have asked for a better turn-out," said Gilles. "Our goal was to educate our local highway guys on improved Best

Management Practices for de-icing operations, and that's what we achieved."

According to the most recent statistics, approximately 9,000 tons of rock salt are used every year in the Lake George basin.

"The municipalities' changes in direction are warranted," said Eric Siy, the executive director of The Fund for Lake George.

"There's a growing body of evidence that salt poses a serious and real threat to the lake and its ecosystem," Siy continued. "We know we have to reduce salt loading in the lake. We're mindful of the need to keep rural roads safe, but we think we can do that and protect the lake at the same time."

According to Siy, a study analyzing trends in the water quality



Above: 9,000 tons of rock salt are used every year by highway departments in the Lake George basin, endangering the lake's water quality. Photo courtesy of New York State Department of Transportation. Below: Bolton's new Highway Superintendent, Bill Sherman, took office on January 1. His mother, Fay, held the bible as he was sworn in.

of the lake over a thirty year period, conducted by the Darrin Fresh Water Institute and financed by the Fund for Lake George, found that the lake's salt levels tripled between 1980 and 2009.

Siy said reducing the amount of salt entering Lake George is a priority of the Jefferson Project, the collaborative effort of The Fund, RPI and IBM to harness research, new technology and financial power together for the preservation of Lake George.

"Everyone who has concerns about the health of the lake can work together on this, using our concerted, collective effort to stop the spread of invasive species as a model. We can't do it in a piecemeal fashion or town by town," said Siy.

According to David Decker, the executive director of the Lake George Watershed Coalition, a pilot project is underway to finance the construction of salt sheds, which help prevent chlorides from leaching into groundwater, nearby streams and ultimately Lake George.

The project will also weigh the relative merits of rock salt substitutes, said Decker.

"We want to know both the long term consequences of current practices as well as the costs and benefits of the alternatives. We want to identify the best management practices and utilize them on Lake George," said Decker.

Financed in part by state funds secured by State Senator Betty Little in 2008 as well as by more recent state grants, awarded through the Environmental Protection Fund, the pilot project helped pay for Bolton's new salt storage shed.

The project will also fund new research by the Darrin Fresh Water Institute, said Decker.

The Lake George Waterkeeper is conducting its own research,



which will be accessible to the Lake George Watershed Coalition, said Decker.

According to Waterkeeper Chris Navitsky, "we're working with Dr. Jim Sutherland, an expert on non-point source pollution, to monitor tributaries of the lake for salt loading. Lake George is classified as a AA-Special water body, which means it's a source for drinking water. If chloride levels continue to rise at the current rate, people with salt restrictive diets will not be able to drink water from the lake."

Rising salt levels also increase the likelihood that new invasive species will establish themselves in Lake George, said Eric Siy.

"As the lake's water quality is degraded, the lake loses its resilience and becomes more vulnerable to all kinds of threats," he said.

While only Lake George Village and Bolton are currently testing road salt substitutes, every community within the Lake George Watershed is participating in the pilot project to some degree, said Decker.

"We're collecting data from highway superintendents throughout the watershed and meeting with them as well as county officials," said Decker.

New York State's Department of Transportation is currently using Clear Lane on Route 9N in Bolton, Bolton Supervisor Ron Conover said.

"Once New York State became involved with looking at salt substitutes, we knew things were coming together to make the changes that will be necessary to protect Lake George," said Conover.

## After BID Vote, Village Merchants and Officials Look to the Future

from page 3

William Kenny, who chairs the county's occupancy tax committee. "Stay tuned," the mayor said. "I'm still fine-tuning it. I'm talking with some of the supervisors."

At present, the committee is comprised of supervisors only. Blais would like to see the committee expanded to include business representatives who are more aware of their community's needs.

Last year, the village got \$138,375 in occupancy tax revenue from the county. Blais defended how the money is spent, saying it funds numerous events that "put heads in beds" such as an Italian Festival, Lake George Arts Project and an annual Oktoberfest. About half the money pays for fireworks, not just

in summer, but for off-season events such as the Adirondack Balloon Festival's "Moonglow."

Bed tax also supports the Lake George Community Band, which brings people to town, and paid for a new electronic sign at Shepard Park that advertises community events, he said.

Trustee John Root said he's disappointed that BID plans were stopped "at the one-yard line."

"Opposition didn't really come out until the hearings were over," he said.

If BID supporters realized how much public opposition existed, a different BID funding mechanism might have been proposed, other than a tax on merchants, such as using a portion of the village's occupancy tax revenue, he said.

In a prepared statement, Blais said Lake George merchants can no longer expect to survive by staying open four or five months per year. He said the business community needs cooperate more and take a greater role in promoting the village.

"Expecting the village to finance, create and organize many activities that the BID is designed to accomplish, will not work in the future," he said.

In related action, the Chamber of Commerce has asked for a major reduction in the fee it pays to rent the Visitors Center at the corner of Beach Road and Canada Street. Last year, it paid \$8,250 for rent plus \$5,000 in building utility costs.

The Chamber had hoped to generate income from merchants by charging them to put flyers and

brochures at the Visitors Center that would be distributed to Lake George tourists. But few merchants have participated.

"It's been a losing proposition for them (the chamber)," Blais said.

The building, which opened six years ago, is owned by the village and cost \$897,000 to construct. Part of it was financed with a 20-year bond.

Chamber rental fees help offset the overall cost.

For 2014, the chamber has proposed paying the building's utility expense (\$5,000), but having the rental dropped to \$1. After discussing the matter, the board said it would make a counter-offer of \$4,000, less than half of last year's rental charge.

The Lake George Association

uses part of the building at no cost.

This summer, Blais said he expects Native American artifacts uncovered last fall on Beach Road to be exhibited at the Visitors Center. Some items are believed to be more than 8,000 years old.

Also, the board approved the appointment of Paul Sullivan to Lake George Fire Department first assistant chief, following the resignation of Jason Carmody. By law, the chief's and first assistant chief's positions must be filled at all times.

Senior-most fire company positions are subject to village board approval.

Fire department elections are held in April. The second assistant chief's job will likely be filled at that time.