

Dear AdkAction.org Members and Friends:

This is the first in a series of quarterly AdkAction.org E-newsletters to keep you informed of what we are doing to give you a stronger voice in Adirondack politics.

AdkAction.org has been busy on your behalf and has accomplished much since it was founded less than two years ago. We could not have done it without your strong backing. We wanted to give you an update and tell you about our plans. We are working on several priority issues – water quality, fair taxes, and voting rights.

Last winter we scored a huge success when we worked with other groups to beat back Governor Paterson's proposed freeze on State tax payments on state land. Had the governor's plan gone forward, the result would have been a devastating transfer of government costs to private taxpayers like us in the Adirondacks where so much land is state owned. At the same time, we pressed forward with work on other issues you have identified as highly important.

Water Quality

Our water quality work is now focused on the horrific damage caused by road salt. Chloride pollution from road salting has become a critical water quality issue. New York is the heaviest user of salt in the country, spreading more than 250 pounds of pure salt per lane mile when it snows. You have probably seen the effects of the salt on your cars as well as the dead trees, victims of this salting, along our roads. Lakes in the Adirondack Park along State roads have chloride levels way over the norm (which for most lakes in the Adirondacks is less than 1 part per million, or ppm). Chloride levels of 10 ppm and higher are usually indicative of pollution and can alter the distribution and abundance of aquatic plant and animal species. Higher salt levels even favor some invasive species over native plants. Here are the current readings for just a few regional lakes which are far in excess of normal levels: Cascade Lake, >100; Lake Colby, 42; Lower St. Regis, 22; Blue Mountain Lake, 17; Chateaugay Lake, 17; Chazy Lake, 16; Paradox Lake, 16; Schroon Lake, 13; Middle Saranac Lake, 12.

We have commissioned a study by scientists at Paul Smith's Adirondack Watershed Institute to definitively assess New York's salting policies and practices, their impacts and costs, and the alternatives. It is our preliminary belief that simple changes in training and practices, e.g., pre-wetting the salt, spreading less of it earlier, not spreading salt at low temperatures (which is actually dangerous), and using less damaging chemicals like magnesium chloride along sensitive roads could both save money and reduce the damage of pollution. Our report will be done before year-end and we will tell you about the results in a future e-newsletter.

Fair Taxes and Assessments

We learned from our conference in August 2008 on state land valuation that local assessors in the Adirondacks often work in isolation with little outside support. An organization for Adirondack assessors once existed, but has become inactive. We are busy planning a conference for next June open to all assessors from across the North Country to facilitate sharing of best assessment practices, the identification of issues and challenges that affect assessors across the North Country, and the development of constructive solutions to those challenges. We will distribute a questionnaire to all assessors to ask them about issues such as consolidated assessment districts, sharing resources and dealing with the State Office of Real Property Assessment (ORPS), the state agency which oversees the local assessment process. This is a first step in addressing one of the most difficult areas of government efficiency while also working towards fairer assessments and tax policies.

We have also earned a seat at the table with the Common Ground Alliance (a coalition of all of the advocacy groups in the Park) and are working with them to independently review the State's methods of valuing its land. We believe that state land is not being valued as though privately held, as required by the state constitution. As a result, a greater and greater cost of government services in the Adirondacks is falling on private property owners.

Taxation without Representation

Our taxation work includes investigating how other states handle the 'taxation without representation' issue for seasonal residents. We are collecting data on which states allow seasonal residents to vote and in which elections, and whether those decisions were made legislatively or as a result of legal actions. Our taxation subcommittee will then formulate proposals for winning representation for our seasonal residents, a group whose Park holdings equal those of year-round residents, but who cannot even vote on school budgets.

In sum, AdkAction.org is working hard for you on the issues you told us that you cared about. We will be updating our member survey before year-end and will invite you to reconfirm or add and subtract issues you want us to work on. Remember, unlike the Adirondack advocacy groups you love and support, we can and do go for the political jugular on these issues. We are not a 501c3, which means you do not get a tax deduction when you support us, but you do get an unaffiliated, nonpartisan, independent, organization that can legally use its funds to influence the people who make the policies that affect you.

So thanks again for your continued support. Stay tuned for continued updates: we plan an e-letter like this every other month.

AdkAction.org

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