



Q1 Newsletter, 2010

Dear AdkAction.org Members and Friends:

This is another in the series of quarterly newsletters we send to keep you up to date on what AdkAction.org has been doing. For the always up-to-date news visit the [News tab at our website](#). It has been a particularly busy and productive winter for us.

### **ROAD SALT STUDY**

In late February AdkAction.org released its study of the impact of road salt on the Adirondacks. This study, financed by you, our members, was conducted by the Adirondack Watershed Institute of Paul Smith's College. The findings are dramatic: road salt damages terrestrial and aquatic plants, weakens bridges and other highway components, damages autos, and causes wild animal strikes on our highways. But most important, the amount being used is excessive and costly. New York could switch to more efficient spreading techniques, requiring less salt, and use salt alternatives at an actual reduction in overall cost with no reduction in safety. If you want a copy of the full study, [click here to order one](#). The Plattsburg Press Republican recently carried [this story](#) about our salt study.

For next steps, we propose to convene a task force representing the towns, villages, county and state agencies as well as the other environmental groups who have an interest in reducing the damage of road salt. This task force would make specific recommendations to be implemented as part of a long-term plan to re-equip fleets, improve techniques and training, and ultimately cut the impact of salt significantly. Stay tuned for progress reports, or, if you are interested in participating in the process, email us at [info@Adkaction.org](mailto:info@Adkaction.org).

### **GOOGLE THE ADIRONDACKS**

Adk.Action.org saw a great opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the Tri-Lakes community in February by urging local governments to enter a Google contest to pick one or more locations where the company will install ultra-high-speed broadband and offer it at competitive prices to end users. Dave Wolff, our steering committee chair, presented the idea to the Harrietstown Board of Supervisors. Within two weeks, the towns of North Elba, Tupper Lake and villages of Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake had joined the effort. The complex application was submitted in record time, including [a web site](#) developed almost overnight to boost our chances. Dave was chosen to coordinate the application process and devoted almost full time to it for two weeks.

AdkAction.org raised its recognition factor in the community and established strong working relationships with community leaders in this project. NCPR carried this excellent [report](#) crediting AdkAction.org and interviewing Dave at length. The local newspaper carried [a story](#) when the project began and [another story](#) when the application was filed. Dave wrote a [letter to the editor](#) summing up the importance of the effort, win or lose. Please visit the [website](#) which will be a key piece of the Google the Adirondacks application during the coming months as Google moves through its selection process. It would be especially helpful if you would follow the link to show

your support by adding a short comment with specifics about how broadband access could benefit the region.

### **HARRIETSTOWN REASSESSMENT**

Doug Tichenor, the assessor for the Towns of Harrietstown, Santa Clara, Brighton, and Franklin has completed a revaluation of the properties in Harrietstown. In February, he [announced](#) that the full value of the town decreased 6% from 2009. He said that the value of residential and commercial property dropped 8% from \$798 million to \$737 million. At the same time, the value of taxable state-owned land increased 15%, from \$129 million to \$152 million. This increase in the value of state-owned land is what AdkAction.org has been advocating since we hosted the Valuation of State Land Conference in 2008.

Doug has introduced a new shoreline formula for use when reassessing waterfront property. The big change is that he is considering that the shoreline is only 1 foot deep as opposed to 200 feet deep. He will apply a step function valuation formula similar to that used in the past, but the starting values will be higher than in 2006. For example, the first 200 feet of shoreline on Lake Kiwassa, St. Regis, and the Saranac Lakes will be valued at \$3,000 per foot instead of the \$2,200 per foot value used in 2006. In addition, if the shoreline property is improved with a driveway, well, septic, etc., Doug will add an additional charge of around \$60,000 to the property's assessed value for the first (primary) acre of land. He will continue to value any acreage in excess of one acre at \$3,000 per acre. By making this change, Doug will be able to apply the same starting shoreline value of \$3,000 per foot to the state owned shoreline on Lake Kiwassa, St. Regis, and the Saranac Lakes. In the past, the state argued that its land was undeveloped and the starting shoreline value should be less than that for private shoreline. Doug is now countering the state's argument by breaking out a separate value for the primary acre of developed property.

In March, Doug announced that the [preliminary assessments](#) for Harrietstown had been mailed out. The form used for the notification is mandated by the state and can be a little misleading. The form lists the assessed value in 2009 and 2010 and the net change. On the surface, a property's assessed value may show an increase, when in reality the property's full market value decreased from 2009 to 2010. The problem lies in the fact that the equalization rate in 2009 was 86% and it was reset to 100% with the revaluation in 2010. To compare like-for-like numbers, one should divide the 2009 property assessment by 86%. This will convert the assessment value to the full market value in 2009. That number should then be compared to the 2010 assessed value which is also the full market value in 2010. Dave Wolff has used his property [to illustrate the situation](#). The preliminary notification form for his property shows a net increase in assessed value of \$104,940 when in fact the full market value of the property decreased by \$28,200.

For those of you who have questions about the process for appealing your preliminary property valuation, see [this article](#) by Marsha Stanley posted on the AdkAction.org website explaining the steps you should take. The deadline to meet with Doug Tichenor to seek an assessment adjustment is May 1st. Grievance Day in Harrietstown is May 25th this year.

### **ADK.ACTION.ORG TO SPONSOR JUNE CONFERENCE OF ADIRONDACK ASSESSORS**

AdkAction.org will sponsor a regional, all-day conference for assessors June 24 at the Harrietstown Hall. Invitations have gone out to 150 assessors in every town in the Adirondack Park and to many which are partially in the park. Supervisors of the 135 associated towns also have been invited. The invitations contained questionnaires asking what topics the officials would like covered at the conference. AdkAction will organize the program around these issues.

We learned in preparation for our summer, 2008 conference on state land values-- attended by more than 100 Adirondack public officials-- that an organization for Adirondack assessors which once existed had become inactive. This conference will give assessors in isolated Adirondack towns a chance to share issues of common concern and compare notes on how to determine values fairly in towns which may have only a handful of sales every year. Fair and equitable assessments are one of AdkAction.org's key issues.

### **REGISTER AND VOTE ON UPCOMING SCHOOL ELECTIONS AND BUDGETS**

We urge all Adirondack property owners to vote this May in local school elections. As you know, school taxes make up the largest share of our local property taxes and have been rising rapidly in recent years despite a significant decline in student enrollments across the Adirondacks. State court [decisions](#) have affirmed the right of seasonal property owners with primary residences elsewhere in New York State to vote at their seasonal address if they choose. Election Law "does not preclude a person from having two residences and choosing one for election purposes provided he or she as 'legitimate, significant and continuing attachment' to that residence." You may vote in school elections in the Adirondacks if you are duly registered by the time of the school election. Click here for a [voter registration form](#).

### **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND (EPF)**

In January, the governor proposed a budget that cut the EPF fund by \$79 million. Specifically, the budget contained the following [statement](#): "The Executive Budget recommends EPF appropriations of \$143 million – a cumulative reduction of \$79 million from the 2009-10 Enacted Budget level. Recommendations include a moratorium on forest preserve and open space land acquisition." It now appears that the widespread concern about the governor's proposal to reduce the EPF is getting results: On March 17th, the New York Senate majority issued a budget resolution that contained the following [entry](#): "The Senate restores the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) appropriations to \$222 million, by providing for additional appropriations totaling \$79 million." On March 24th, the Assembly proposed an EPF of \$168 million, with \$44.3 million for land. The Senate, Assembly and Governor must now agree to a three-way deal to fund these proposals. Concerned members may wish to contact their assembly and senate representatives.