

ENVIRONMENT

Lake George salt level on the rise

Noted scientist to give Saturday talk at the Sagamore on lake's declining water quality

By Rick Karlin

Albany

Much effort has gone into keeping invasive species such as Asian clams or Eurasian milfoil out of Lake George. But there's another, lesser-known intruder: road salt.

A noted environmental scientist will present data Saturday showing that the levels of sodium chloride, or salt, in the lake has tripled over three decades. It's not yet at a crisis level, but Jeffrey Short warns it could become a major problem if something isn't done.

Overall, Short said Lake George has good water quality, but the rising salt levels are a "glaring exception."

Based in Alaska, Short has for years helped follow the health of Lake George in association with the Darrin Freshwater Institute. He'll discuss his findings Saturday as part of the Fund For Lake George's annual meeting at the Sagamore Resort starting at 9 a.m.

The source of the change in the lake's composition, Short said, is road salt used on streets and highways in the approximately 360-square-mile area that serves as a catchbasin for the lake.

An estimated 9 tons a year ends up in the water, he said. Eventually, it will cause an alteration in the lake's phytoplankton, microscopic organisms that help support the water's food web. With more salt, that phytoplankton can over time turn to blue-green algae, which supports fewer fish.

The solution, Short said, is to find an alternative road treat-

ment or a way to greatly reduce the amount of road salt used during winter. But alternatives are costly and many road crews consider salt the most reliable and affordable way to help keep the roads ice-free.

"It's still the most effective treatment," said Beau Duffy, a spokesman for the state Department of Transportation, which puts out an average of 805 tons of salt on state roads each winter. The agency has used some alternatives such as liquid salt brine, and has started using more precisely controlled spreaders.

Not all of the news on Lake George is bad, said Short: Tougher emission standards for power plants have led to less acid rain in the lake over the years.

Saturday's meeting will include a talk on the Fund's Jefferson Project, which uses research and technology to keep the lake healthy for future generations. The session is open to the public.

► rkarlin@timesunion.com 518-454-5758 @RickKarlinTU

