

IE22.15 - Minimizing Salt Pollution that Poison Rivers and Streams, Lenka Holubec, ProtectNatureTO

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RE: IE22.15 - Minimizing Salt Pollution that Poison Rivers and Streams

Dear chair Paula Fletcher and the members of the Infrastructure & Environment Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on **IE22.15 - Minimizing Salt Pollution that Poison Rivers and Streams**.

"Some of Ontario's waterways are now as salty as the ocean, WWF Canada says. World Wildlife Fund Canada said its new maps tracking chloride from road salt show levels in many rural and urban southern Ontario waterways are increasing dangerously."

The southern Ontario, is very fortunate to be situated in the Great Lakes Basin. The Great Lakes and their basin are crucial for Ontario's economy, providing drinking water, energy, food, and recreational opportunities. Living in the Great Lakes Basin comes with our responsibility to safeguard this vital fresh water ecosystem for future generations.

This is to fully support Councillor's Dianne Saxe recommendations:

1. City Council request the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to adopt limited occupier liability legislation that protects property owners and managers, including municipalities, from slip and fall lawsuits, provided that they have taken all reasonable steps to follow Provincial best-management practices for salt use in controlling snow and ice.
2. And to work urgently with key stakeholders to develop legislation, including enforceable contractor training and a single set of Provincially-endorsed standard best management practices for snow and ice management.
3. City Council direct the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services to continue to minimize the use of road salt as much as possible while maintaining safety on roads, parking lots and sidewalks.
4. This resolution be sent to all municipalities in the GTA, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), local MPPs, Conservation Ontario, the Ontario Municipal Water Association, Minister Todd McCarthy (MECP), Attorney General Doug Downey, and Premier Doug Ford.

Sincerely,

Lenka Holubec, on behalf of [ProtectNatureTO](https://www.protectnatureto.ca)

Background:

From the little creeks, rivers and ponds in Toronto, such as the Grenadier Pond in High Park, protected as the Provincially Significant Wetland, over the Lake Ontario, the salt is everywhere, including the ground water, harming the very ecosystems and fresh water critical for life.

PSW-Evaluation-Grenadier-Pond-Wetland-Complex TRCA 2022

“The input of excess nutrients and road salt can alter soil and water chemistry influencing the species diversity, often favouring non-native salt-tolerant species, particularly European common reed. The surrounding urban areas are a source for invasive species that pose a constant threat to the quality of its flora”

It is particularly important to pay attention to land uses within the urban catchment area upstream of the wetland complex. These wetlands are particularly sensitive to nutrient inputs, hydrological changes, and hydrogeological changes since they are connected to the groundwater. To this end, the application of the City of Toronto Green Standard and Low Impact Development strategies in the catchment area would be of great benefit. This would include planting of locally sourced native trees such as oaks, increasing runoff infiltration, and sequestering any runoff containing road salt, hydrocarbons, or other contaminants”

Researchers say excessive chloride use is assaulting our lakes and rivers

Crowdsourced global experiment investigated the impact of road salt and current environmental standards

“It doesn’t take much dissolved salt to make water harmful for many aquatic organisms; for example, just one teaspoon (about five grams) of salt in a typical large water cooler jug (five gallons or 19 litres) is enough,” says co-author Dr. Andrea Kirkwood, Associate Professor of Biology at Ontario Tech University. “The acceptable threshold for chloride concentration in Canada is 120 milligrams per litre (mg/L), while in the United States it is considerably less stringent at 230 mg/L.”

Ask the Expert: Is road salt making the Great Lakes saltier?

“Most of the chloride reaching the Great Lakes comes from direct human-caused sources. The largest of these are road salt applications and salt from water softeners.

How much salt is in the Great Lakes?

The Great Lakes are freshwater ecosystems. Traditionally, Lake Michigan, for example, has been a very low-salt lake, with levels around one milligram of chloride per liter of water. Over the years, due to our increased salt use, that level has steadily but gradually climbed up to 15 milligrams per liter.”

The Price of Salt: How Road Salts Are Affecting Our Great Lakes

“The salty waters can flow into groundwater supplies, killing sensitive species, and ultimately degrading ecosystems. Some spots in Ontario have become so salty that there have been sightings of saltwater animals in the freshwater creeks. Reports of saltwater blue crabs living in Mimico Creek is just one troubling case that illustrates the extent of sodium chloride pollution in the Great Lakes watersheds.”

Groundwater as a source and pathway for road salt contamination of surface water in the Lake Ontario Basin: “In Ontario, there is limited comprehensive research regarding the contribution of chloride in groundwater to surface water systems. The delivery of chloride via groundwater can contribute to the degradation of the Great Lakes and their tributaries”