

For Immediate Release

Date: 04/21/2017

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Citizen Scientist Volunteers Needed for Essex Road Salt Study

Essex, VT – Do you harbor a passion for protecting local water quality and are seeking a meaningful way to give back to your community this summer? Then consider volunteering for the Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District's (WNRCD) new Citizen Scientist sampling program in Essex!

If you're a Vermonter, you've likely heard about the summer algal blooms in Lake Champlain from excessive nutrient runoff, but what about the other pollutants impairing the health of our streams and lakes? Between 10 and 20 million tons of salt are applied to roads across the United States annually, and the science is clear: road salt application is having a negative impact on our water resources.

Elevated amounts of sodium chloride within our waterways are due largely to road salt application during winter. Excessive sodium chloride reduces fish spawning, degrades instream habitat, encourages establishment of invasive species, and harms our sensitive, native species like Brook Trout and Sugar Maple. An increase in chloride levels also shifts algal species dominance from green algae to cyanobacteria, which could exacerbate the toxic algal blooms already impacting our waterbodies.

Foreseeing the issue road salt poses on stream health, the Essex Department of Public Works has significantly reduced the amount of road salt applied to public roads over the last 10 years, and has even implemented a winter sampling program of their own. WNRCD's new monitoring project will re-sample Alder, Indian, and Sunderland Brooks (as well as chloride-impaired Sunnyside Brook in Colchester), which were previously sampled in 2006 by the Essex Waterways Association, to determine if the legacy effect of sodium chloride has reduced over this time from the implementation of reduced road salt application.

If you are interested in volunteering for the WNRCD Citizen Scientist monitoring program and collecting samples, please contact holly@winooskinrcd.org or call 802-288-8155 ext. 104. The sampling season will be every Sunday from June 4th – October 15th, and we are hoping for commitments of at least one month. For more information on the Sodium Chloride reduction initiative and the Citizen Scientist monitoring effort, please visit the WNRCD website at: www.winooskinrcd.org or email: info@winooskinrcd.org

The Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District is one of 14 conservation districts throughout Vermont. It encompasses all of Chittenden and Washington County as well as parts of Orange County (Orange, Williamstown and Washington). The district relies on grants and individual donations to complete its conservation work. The WNRCD focuses its resources on completing conservation projects within the areas of agricultural assistance, forestland enhancement, urban conservation and watershed stewardship.