

Report to FOCA AGM for decision

Meeting: March 7, 2026

From: Environmental Advisory Group and FOCA Board

Purpose: To approve a resolution regarding road salt in Ontario and FOCA's role

Background:

Snow and ice are facts of life during Ontario winters. Road salt is a relatively inexpensive and effective way to reduce the risk to pedestrians and drivers in Ontario. Its use has increased significantly with urban expansion, climate change and liabilities for slips and falls. While road salt has been declared a toxic substance "because of tangible threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage" by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME), it is a substance that will continue to be used, in contrast to other toxic substances. While there are substitutes, they tend to be more expensive and come with their own issues. There are no treatments for runoff of salt laden water as it remains in solution.

Monitoring is showing increasing levels of salt in rivers and lakes. In a lake salt makes water denser and thus it sinks to the bottom of the lake where it may prevent proper mixing of the water column and re-oxygenation of the bottom waters so important to the aquatic ecosystem and especially fisheries.

Rationale:

A groundswell of concern for managing the effects of salt on our waterbodies before too much damage is done has begun. FOCA periodically collaborates with the Ontario Salt Pollution Coalition as part of our advocacy role. The Ontario Salt Pollution Coalition is a group of individuals, community groups, and environmental non-profits who are coordinated by Water Watchers.

The coalition is seeking change in how salt is managed in Ontario through:

1. Convening of experts to guide and inform provincial action on road salting
2. Protection of water with monitoring, salt limits and remediation
3. Commitments to reduce the use of salt
4. Regulatory reform and standards

One of the measures sought to reduce its use is a regulated snow and ice management system, supported by a strong legal framework to indemnify certified contractors thus reducing their liability allowing snow and ice operators to greatly improve salt management.

More than 28 municipalities have passed a salt pollution resolution, with more to come. Many of these resolutions have been brought to councils by lake associations across Ontario.

Through FOCA's recently formed Environmental Advisory Group, action on salt has been a topic of conversation. FOCA can lend its voice and platform, encouraging members to get involved and carry the issue forward locally.

Financial Implications: There is no cost to be part of the coalition.

Resolution of the FOCA membership:

Whereas road salt is a known toxic substance designated under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act because of tangible threats of serious or irreversible environmental and health damage from road salt; and

Whereas salt levels in Ontario's groundwater aquifers, creeks, rivers, and lakes have increasingly worsened since the 1970s, seriously affecting municipal drinking water sources and aquatic life; and

Whereas recent evidence suggests that soft water/ shield lakes may experience effects at 10-20 mg/L, significantly below the federal CCME guideline of 120 mg/l (long term maximum); and

Whereas the Ontario and Canadian governments have taken many actions over the past 25 years including setting water quality guidelines, developing voluntary codes of practice, signing the Canada-Ontario Great Lakes Agreement, and holding workshops, yet the salt problem continues to grow; and

Whereas numerous situation analyses have recommended salt solutions involving liability protection, contractor certification, government-approved Best Management Practices (BMPs) and salt management plans.

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. FOCA urges the province of Ontario to work urgently with key stakeholders to develop limited liability legislation, including enforceable contractor training and a single set of provincially endorsed standard BMPs for snow and ice management; and
2. FOCA urges the province of Ontario to create and fund an expert stakeholder advisory committee to advise the province and municipalities on the best courses of action to protect freshwater ecosystems and drinking water from the impacts of salt pollution; and
3. This resolution be sent to FOCA's member associations and encourage them to engage their municipalities in salt mitigation efforts; and
4. This resolution be forwarded to the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, Minister of Transportation and the Attorney General; and
5. And further, that FOCA become a formal member of the Ontario Salt Pollution Coalition.