



We Raise Our (Stocking) Caps to Those Who Clear the Roads

By Margaret Vos
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With the help of a snowplow named Darth Blader (other areas of the state have plows named Snowbi Wan Kenobi and Plow Bunyan) and a good many nameless snowplows, the approximately 60 miles of roadways surrounding Mille Lacs Lake are maintained by the workers of Aitkin, Crow Wing, and Mille Lacs Counties as well as those of MNDOT District 3. These tireless women and men work hard to keep our roadways safe and the watersheds of Mille Lacs Lake healthy, especially during our long winter season.

As the snow season begins to wind down, the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group (MLLWMG) commends the work that is done by the three counties and MNDOT to make highways safe after a snow event while keeping the environment healthy, and doing so within the constraints of limited budgets.

The good news is that all three counties as well as MNDOT share our goal of maintaining healthy land and a healthy lake. Here's how these goals are being achieved:

- Salt use on roads is limited; a mixture of 70-80% sand and 30-20% salt is what is usually used to keep our environment protected and our roadways clear and safe.
- Some snowplows are equipped to take measurements of road and air temperatures that provide guidance for adapting road maintenance to the existing weather conditions. One treatment does not work for all situations. The ideal speed for snowplows is 18 mph; at this speed the sand-salt mixture does not go into the ditch.
- The use of salt brine and Beet Heet in extremely cold conditions is an organic way to clear icy roads since this sugar-based deicer does not freeze.

Snow events around Mille Lacs Lake are managed by the rule of the 4 Rs:

Right Material
Right Time
Right Place
Right Amount

The type of snow removal treatment is based on traffic volume, which also determines the level of snow removal maintenance during the winter season. For this reason, certain roads around Mille Lacs Lake are cleared sooner than others.

Next time you see a snowplow, give it a break and wave to the driver, who is doing such excellent work to keep our roads safe and our lake healthy.