

WISCONSIN SALT WISE

2025 Annual Report



Presented to *Fund for Lake Michigan*

Presented by *Allison Madison*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Salt Wise Events Map	4
Winter Salt Week 2025	5
Season Debriefs	6
Open Houses	7
Salt Wise Instruction	8
Property Manager Outreach	9
Statewide Grant Program	10
WI APWA Award	11
Midwest Snow & Ice	12
National Expertise	13
Public Outreach	14
Social Media	15
Media Coverage	16-19

INTRODUCTION

2025 was a pivotal year for strengthening local Salt Wise communities and leveraging trusted partnerships to reach new audiences across Wisconsin.

In April, we hosted Salt Wise Season Debriefs in Madison and Milwaukee. These events facilitated cross-sector dialogue between department of public works staff and private snow removal contractors. While Salt Wise has historically trained these groups separately, the depth and openness of the conversations underscored how much participants share in common and helped attendees better understand the unique challenges each group faces. The richness of these exchanges made it clear that future Salt Wise programming would benefit from more intentional opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Social learning has long been a cornerstone of the Salt Wise Equipment Open Houses, but in 2025 we incorporated more structured small-group conversations into our workshops.

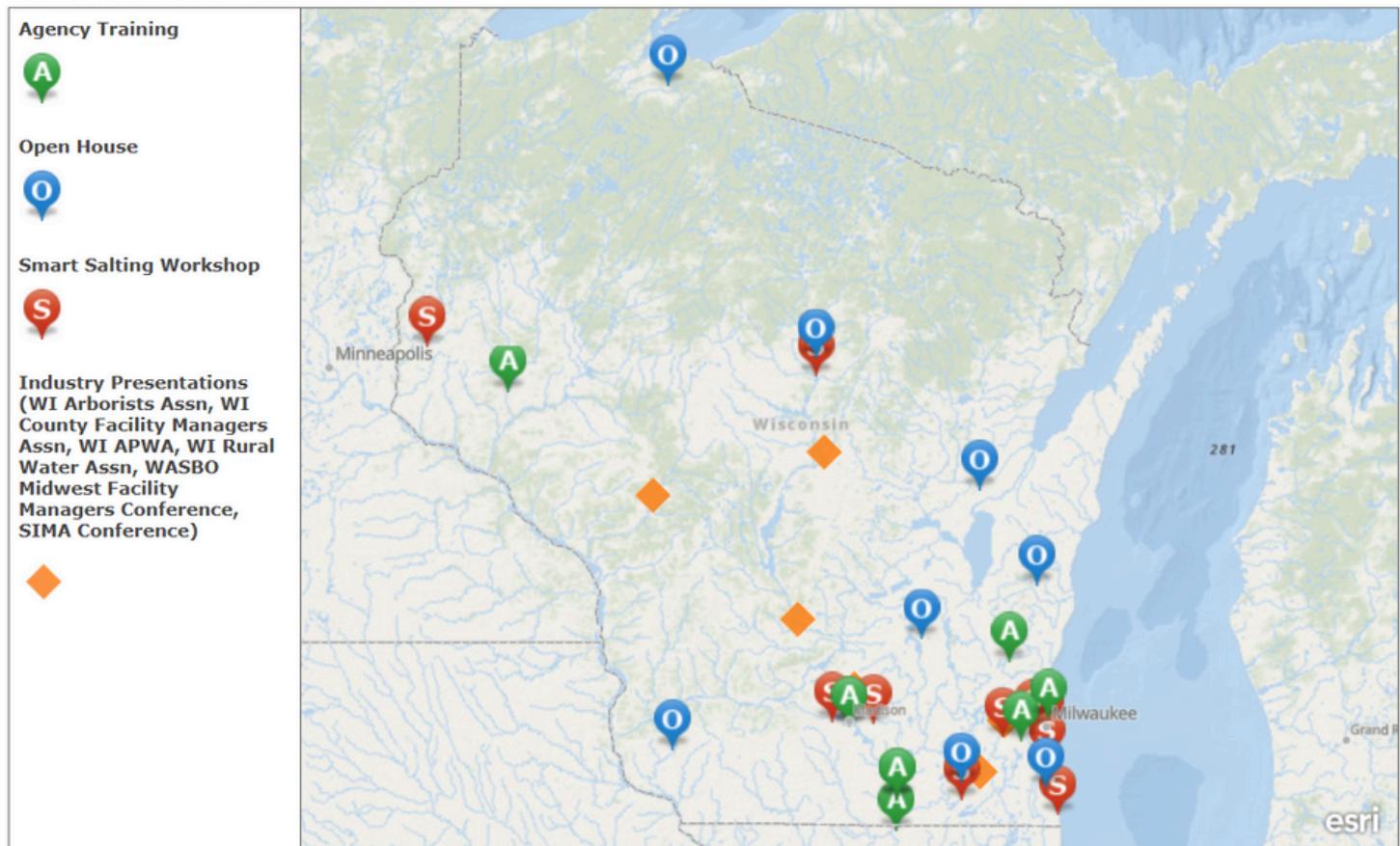
Insights from the Madison-area Season Debrief also directly shaped new programming. In July, we partnered with local contractors to host the first-ever Salt Wise 101 for Property Managers, addressing a clear need identified by participants. Planning is underway for a repeat event in February 2026. This high-level curriculum was also adapted for presentations to the International Facility Management Association–Fox Valley Chapter and a local chamber of commerce. Both of these presentations were made possible through partner connections.

Another new practice introduced in 2025 was inviting participants to share their current winter maintenance practices at the start of each event and to identify a specific next step at the conclusion. This approach not only reinforced accountability and reflection, but also provides Salt Wise with better insight into on-the-ground practices and goals. Improved tracking of this information will help us more effectively support participants and further reduce salt pollution in Lake Michigan and freshwater resources across the state.

Thank you for your critical support!
Allison Madison

SALT WISE EVENTS

2025 Practitioner Education Events



CHS, Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue | Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USFWS

*Multiple events in Madison, Janesville, and Wausau.



*Nine
agency trainings*



*Eight
open houses*



*Fifteen
Workshops*

WINTER SALT WEEK 2025

The debut of a “national” awareness week

WINTER SALT WEEK 2025

DAILY LIVE STREAMS

27 JAN	MONDAY AN EYE ON SALT POLLUTION ABBY HILEMAN SALT WATCH COORDINATOR IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA	
28 JAN	TUESDAY DILUTION IS NOT THE SOLUTION DR. JESS HUA ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR UW-MADISON FOREST AND WILDLIFE ECOLOGY DEPARTMENT	
29 JAN	WEDNESDAY PUBLIC WORKS PERSPECTIVES MUNICIPAL AGENCY STAFF MAINE, MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, VA/MD/DC, WISCONSIN	
30 JAN	THURSDAY POLICY SOLUTIONS PANEL TED DIERS NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	
31 JAN	CARA HARDESTY OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY BRYAN GRUIDL CITY OF BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA	
FRIDAY	LOCAL ACTION DAY SALT MONITORING LOOK ONLINE FOR AN EVENT NEAR YOU	

WINTERSALTWEEK.ORG

Winter Salt Week 2025 captured the attention of thousands through radio waves, air waves, and word of mouth.

With over 900 registrants from 30+ states, this was the biggest Winter Salt Week yet.



3,299
Webinar
Views

SEASON DEBRIEFS

Strengthening the Salt Wise community

In April, Salt Wise hosted Salt Wise season debriefs in the Madison area (City of Fitchburg) and Milwaukee area (City of Wauwatosa). The goal was to facilitate small group conversations around winter maintenance successes and pain points and foster greater collaboration across sectors.

“The Salt Wise debrief was excellent, and we definitely felt it was a valuable use of our time. It was great to connect with everyone. In fact, I think that format is one of the best I’ve experienced. The roundtable discussion with other contractors was incredibly helpful for sharing insights, and hearing directly from the municipalities provided a much-needed perspective. That was probably the most productive and insightful hour I’ve dedicated to this topic in a while.”

Private Contractor Attendee



OPEN HOUSES

Strengthening the Salt Wise community

In addition to building interest and excitement among operators, a new focus in 2025 was to invite local and state elected officials to learn about the benefits of investing in smart salting technologies.



Clockwise from top left: Beaver Dam attendees, Village of Walworth brine equipment, UW-Platteville brinemaker, Outagamie County remote weather stations

SALT WISE INSTRUCTION

Public Workshops and Agency Trainings for 900+ industry professionals

Highlights from this year's training included a workshop hosted by the City of New Richmond (top photo) in which we intentionally intermixed staff from each municipality to maximize social learning in a room with no AV tech, a workshop at Sommers Landscape Supply for which they purchased a projector and screen and invited all their customers (local contractors), and a workshop at the Kenosha Public Museum with over 110 DPW staff from southeastern Wisconsin.



PROPERTY MANAGERS

Outreach and Education

Property Managers are a key stakeholder group that we've identified and have wanted to get in front of for years. In 2025, we made some significant strides thanks to support from private contractors and municipal partners. We're poised to repeat Salt Wise 101 for Property Managers early in 2026, this time as a hybrid event.

Clockwise from top:
International
Facilities Managers
Association - Fox
Valley Chapter, Salt
Wise 101 for Property
Managers, City of
Middleton Chamber
of Commerce



STATEWIDE GRANT PROGRAM UPDATE

In his 2025-26 Executive budget, Governor Evers earmarked \$5 million for the creation of a “Winter Safety Improvement Grant Program.”

We subsequently engaged in conversation with all members of the Joint Finance. Unfortunately, part-way through the budget process, an additional unwritten rule was adopted requiring all new budget proposals to have a stand-alone bill. This was a major hurdle for us to overcome. In the end, State Representative Rick Gundrum drafted a bill, but we didn’t meet the deadline for securing Senate support.

SALT POLLUTION REDUCTION

GRANT PROGRAM PROPOSAL

BACKGROUND

Salt (sodium chloride) is a permanent pollutant in our water. Sodium and chloride levels are continuing to increase in Wisconsin's lakes, streams, and drinking water, and the only way to address this issue is to reduce salt pollution at its source.

Advances in snow and ice control including ground speed control systems, improved plow blade technologies, and the utilization of salt brine, enable annual road salt reductions of 25-50%. Unfortunately, the initial capital investment cost of this equipment prohibits many municipalities from tapping into these benefits. Grant program dollars for equipment and staff training can jumpstart long-term savings in annual salt use and reduced infrastructure repair costs, and protect our freshwater resources.

PROGRAM COST

- \$4.5 million grant dollars
- 0.25 FTE for grant program administration

FORECASTED BENEFITS

- Salt reduction of 10,000 Tons/year
- Salt savings of \$1 million/year
- Reduced infrastructure damage of \$10-30 million/year
- 10,000 Olympic swimming pools of freshwater protected each year

SIMILAR PROGRAMS

OHIO: In 2024, Ohio EPA awarded \$4.4 million to local units of government to fund upgrades to road salt application equipment and storage facilities through their H2Ohio Rivers Initiative.

MINNESOTA: The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency offers grant funding to support local coordination of chloride pollution reduction efforts. Eligible recipients include governmental agencies, for-profit businesses, and NGOs, that will develop and implement chloride reduction action plans in communities or industrial facilities.

AMPLIFYING THE POWER OF BEST PRACTICES

To ensure the greatest impact of program dollars, all applicants should complete the Wisconsin APWA Excellence in Snow and Ice Control self-assessment as a pre- and post-measure of practices. This self-assessment requires evidence of calibration for each salt spreader. Calibration alone consistently cuts salt use by 20-40%.

Grant recipients should commit to pursuing smart salting training for operators and to host and/or attend a regional winter equipment open house to share their experience and learnings with a network of peers to further promote knowledge-sharing among agencies.

The scoring rubric for the grant applications could be designed to preferentially support communities of need: towns, villages, more rural counties, and/or joint applications with a coalition of agencies that wish to make a shared purchase of a brine maker, calibration scale, remote weather stations, etc.

EXAMPLES OF QUALIFIED EQUIPMENT

- Pavement temperature sensors
- Sectional or live-edge blades
- Rubberized blades
- Remote weather stations
- Pre-wet systems
- Anti-icing systems
- Storage tanks

SALT LEVELS: PAST, CURRENT, FUTURE

Background levels of chloride (salt) in drinking water and surface water are 0-10mg/L across most of the state.

Today, chloride levels are commonly in the 10's to 100's year-round and, spike into the 1,000's in our urbanized streams. 208 public drinking water wells exceed 120 mg/L, the preventative action limit for chloride.

Wisconsin
Salt Wise

10

WI APWA EXCELLENCE IN SNOW AND ICE CONTROL AWARD



2024 Award Winners:

Town of Linn, Wisconsin Rapids, Walworth County Highway Department

2025 Award Winners:

Paddock Lake, DeForest, De Pere, and Oak Creek

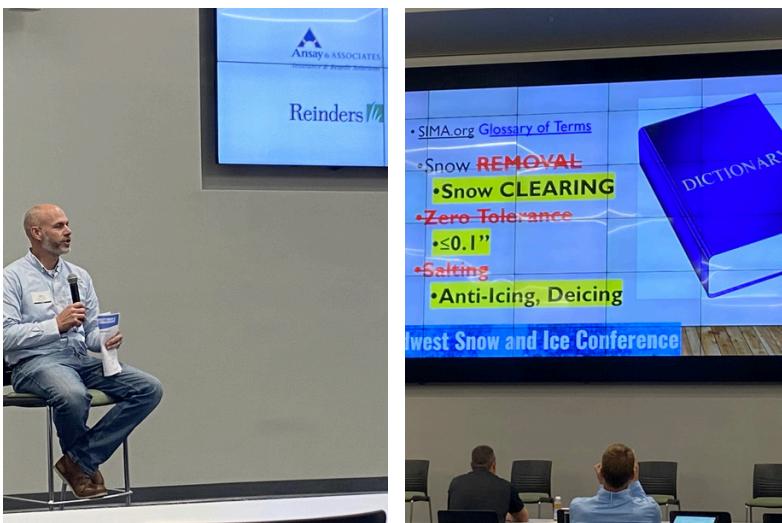
WI Salt Wise catalyzed the creation of this award through conversations with American Public Works Association (APWA) Executive Committee and Awards Committee members, draft application and rubric documents, award promotion, judges recruitment, and score summarization with an Awards Committee member who made final recommendations to the Awards Committee chair.

In recognition of Salt Wise's contributions to the award, we were invited to present the awards to the 2024 winners at the WI APWA 2025 Spring Conference. (See conference banquet photo and photo with Rich Hough, Walworth County Highway Department Commissioner, and Shelly Billingsley, WI APWA Chapter President.)

MIDWEST SNOW & ICE

Snow & Ice Management Association Conference - Pewaukee, Wisconsin

Salt Wise sits on the advisory committee for this conference and helps recruit speakers and attendees. In addition to presenting, we facilitated the Salt Reduction Success Stories Panel.



Salt Wise assisted in planning and coordination of the second annual Midwest Snow and Ice Conference focused on accelerating the adoption of best practices in snow and ice control.

NATIONAL EXPERTISE

2025 highlights included invitations to present in person at the APWA National Snow Conference (Grand Rapids, MI), the Adirondack Champlain Regional Salt Summit (Lake George, NY), and the Minnesota Stormwater Seminar Series (Minneapolis, MN). The all-expenses paid trip to New York to share lessons learned and connect with colleagues from New York and New England - strengthening the Salt Wise brand and reach - was my personal favorite.



From top left:
Adirondack
Champlain Regional
Salt Summit
Agenda, posing with
MN colleagues
before the seminar,
and the session I
facilitated at the
APWA National
Snow Conference.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Presentations for the Clean Lakes Alliance, Henry Vilas Zoo after-school program, DNR, Mississippi River RPC, Sustainable U Lecture Series, WI Lakes Association, Madison Water Utility Board, Fox-Wolf Watershed Conference, Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee, Public Health Madison-Dane County Board Meeting, Elvehjem Elementary School, AWRPC Summit, Rotary International Green Team, Olbrich Botanical Gardens staff, Friends of Owen Conservation Park, Lake Country Clean Waters, Village of Oregon and City of Verona Sustainability Committees, and additional outreach activities pictured.



Clockwise from top left:
 Science teaching for social justice cohort, UW Ethical and Responsible Business Network, WI APWA Snowplow Roadeo, Salt Wise volunteer Sydney Kerstein's Edgewood University Senior Thesis Defense

SOCIAL MEDIA



Instagram
720 followers
22.8K reach
(up 48% from 2024)

Facebook

1.2K followers
132.5K views
(Facebook changed available metrics)



YouTube

361 subscribers
8.9k views
(up 71% from 2024)

MEDIA COVERAGE

TITLE	MEDIA OUTLET	MONTH
Grant County looks to increase use of brine	Boscobel Dial	January
On a low-salt diet? New data shows water from Wisconsin public wells could be a problem.	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	January
Wisconsin waters have a road salt problem. Here's what to know and how to help.	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	January
Wausau School District lowering salt usage and seeing benefits	WAOW - Wausau	January
Protect Wisconsin's waters by reducing your salt use	Spooner Advocate	January
Cutting back on salt in the winter is key to keeping healthy environment	Fox 11 - Green Bay	January
Reduce salt use to keep chlorides down in drinking water	Courier Sentinel - Lake Holcombe	January
Reducing use of salt in winter	WPR - Larry Meiller show	January
Protect Wisconsin's waters by reducing your salt use	Hub City Times - Marshfield	January
Madison's drinking water is getting saltier, road salt likely to blame	Cap Time - Madison	January

MEDIA COVERAGE

TITLE	MEDIA OUTLET	MONTH
Oak Creek highlights practices to reduce salt usage as part of Winter Salt Awareness Week	Spectrum TV	January
Winter Salt Awareness Week kicks off focusing on reducing salt pollution	WKOW - Madison	January
Tips to limit your salt usage on sidewalks and driveways	WSAW - Wausau	January
Winter Salt Week 2025 raises awareness about reducing salt pollution	Sustainably Speaking; Green Bay	January
Local organizations continue to reduce salt usage as part of Winter Salt Week	WEAU - Eau Claire	January
How-To: Salt Wisely	Badger Alumni Magazine	January
Environmental Advocates aim to raise awareness about salt concentration in Madison water	WKOW - Madison	January
Dangers of Salt Pollution	Rhinelander	February
Interview	I Heart Radio	February
Interview	Civic Media	February

MEDIA COVERAGE

TITLE	MEDIA OUTLET	MONTH
Sudden snow melts becoming more common, dumping more salt into area waterways experts say	Channel 3000 Madison	February
CVTC Colleague Creates Snow Removal System to Save Money, Environment	CVTC	August
County showcases 'revolution' in clearing winter roads	The Review Plymouth	October
Use Your Melting Salt Wisely	WSAU Wausau	October
Preventing Road Salt Pollution	TMJ4 Milwaukee	October
Weathering winter: Get ready for Wisconsin's upcoming winter	Spectrum News1	November
UWO students raise awareness about the impact of road salt	Spectrum News1	December
Lake Country Clean Water meeting examines how chloride levels are impacting Wisconsin	The Freeman Waukesha Cty	December
Madison unveils snowplow trading cards featuring community-named fleet	WKOW Madison	December

MEDIA COVERAGE

TITLE	MEDIA OUTLET	MONTH
Salt Wise hosts open house to inform community members about salt effects on Wisconsin lakes	WKOW Madison	December
Wisconsin Salt Wise program trains contractors on reducing road salt pollution	WMTV Madison	December
Wisconsin Salt Wise program trains crews to reduce road salt pollution	Channel 3000 Madison	December
Study shows southeast Wisconsin waterways are seeing rising chloride levels	Spectrum News1	December
As winter weather continues, experts warn of negative impacts of road salt	Channel 15 Madison	December

muni/org	Current ops	
Franklin	pre-treat w/ brine Belt Fleet Straight steel/carbide	try out segmented live-edge
Cudahy	pre-treat *Calibration* emphasis on plowing - James Straight	solar salt for brinemaking
West Milwaukee	pretreat annual calibration Steel/carbide	segmented blades research blends -
West Allis	pretreat ↑ annual calibration Steel/carbide blades Frost stations	calibrate smaller equipment
David J. Frank	make brine - pretreat + pre-wet 500-750lb/acre	solar salt for brinemaking / new weather stations / blend options
Waterford	pretreat w/ brine	calibration; blades research
Oak Creek	(1) Calibration (manual → force/m) (2) Polar Flex Segmented blades (3) Temp sensors (150-350lb/lnmi)	more liquid

THANKS FOR
YOUR
CONTINUED
SUPPORT!

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