



THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

July 13, 2017

Commissioner Basil Seggos
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway, 14th Floor
Albany, NY 12233-1010

Dear Commissioner Seggos:

We write now regarding serious concerns that have been raised concerning parallels between the Retsof mine, which collapsed in 1994, and a similar Cargill salt mine directly underneath Cayuga Lake. The Retsof mine disaster led to massive sink holes, land subsidence, and property damage. A key question is whether relatively new "small pillar" mining techniques used at the two mines may be insufficient to resist powerful geologic forces associated with both the continental-scale compression that is impacting the glacial valley sediments and, most importantly, the glacial scour-weakened (by thinning) lithified strata that is the overburden at both locations.

We met with your staff on June 15th to discuss our concerns. This issue has become a community concern connected to Cargill's pending permit modification application, which would allow for the construction of a new mine shaft 4. The Department describes the modification as related to "safety precautions, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) regulations and the increasing distance from the current underground operations..." However, there are community concerns that if Cargill's application is granted, it would have the effect of expanding salt mining activities under Cayuga Lake which is precisely where lateral compressive tectonic forces are most severe. It has been argued that additional mining under the lake could lead to catastrophic rupture of the roof of the mine. Such a rupture would not only damage a priceless public resource but also impair the drinking water supply for thousands of residents.

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It is against that background we wish to bring to your attention important new information that was conveyed at the June meeting by geologist Dr. Richard Young, Distinguished Service Professor at SUNY Geneseo. Dr. Young's technical presentation, a copy of which is attached, raises profound questions about the wisdom of allowing future salt mining under Cayuga Lake.

We urge that the Department to enact a moratorium on permits or authorizations and avoid approving activities, which will directly, or indirectly, lead to salt mining under Cayuga Lake. The new geological information is compelling, and a mine disaster under the Lake would be catastrophic.

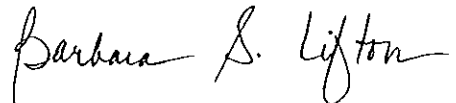
A prohibition on mining under the Lake would not mean an end to mining activities, but would instead focus future salt mining under dry land areas surrounding the lake with more geologic stability. In the course of the meeting, we understood your staff expert to indicate that he had already communicated that Cargill should begin making arrangements with local property owners to mine under dry land instead of under the Lake. We think this is an important first step that should become policy.

The new information identified by Dr. Young deserves thorough and careful consideration. Public health and safety is a critical issue. Thank you again for making your staff available and for your consideration of this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or suggestions.

Sincerely,



Steve Englebright, Chairman, NYS Assembly
Environmental Conservation Committee



Barbara S. Lifton, Member
New York State Assembly