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Cooperstown officials oppose spraying along lake

By Joe Mahoney Staff writer

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Mayor Jeff Katz said Friday there is no reason for the state agency to spray chemical concoctions at the weeds along the road side when the growth can be controlled in the same way that Otsego County highway department workers address the same issue along County Route 28 on the east side of the lake: mowing.

Faced with the local opposition last summer, DOT agreed to a temporary suspension of spraying a product called Accord XRT II, which contains glyphosate, the same active ingredient in Roundup, a product made by Monsanto.

“We got a good result last year, and I’m hoping we can again this year,” Katz said.

DOT has described Accord XRT II as a safe product to use near water supplies, noting it is approved by the state Department of Environmental Conservation and is used to control vegetation near the New York City watershed reservoirs. DOT officials have described the product as effective in eradicating knotweed and poison ivy.

Katz said no meetings have been formally scheduled so far this year to discuss the issue.

DOT officials contacted Friday by The Daily Star said they had no immediate information on the agency’s plan this summer for Route 80. A DOT spokesman based at the agency’s Binghamton office referred questions to DOT headquarters.

The agency’s communications director, Beau Duffy, said the officials familiar with the planning were not available Friday.

James Dean, the chairman of the village of Cooperstown's Environmental Conservation Committee, said he strongly opposes herbicide applications along Route 80, which runs along the lake's west bank.

"Some of the people along the lake are taking their water 50 feet away from the spraying," Dean said. "I don't support the spraying of herbicides. I think Cooperstown needs to set an example."

Cooperstown did set an example last year when Katz, Dean and other village officials prevailed in weaning village-owned Doubleday Field - a baseball diamond that is often described as a shrine to the national pastime - from herbicide applications, replacing them with non-chemical means of countering weeds and grubs.

Adrian Kuzminski of Fly Creek, the founder of Sustainable Otsego, said local environmental activists have a long history of pressing to keep Otsego Lake as pristine as possible.

"It would be a big step backwards if they go back to spraying," Kuzminski said.

The Otsego Lake Watershed Advisory Committee has also urged DOT to find alternatives to spraying.

Katz, in a letter to a top DOT official two years ago, said that under Public Health Law Section 1100, the village was authorized to create watershed rules and regulations, which state "no herbicides, pesticides, or toxic chemicals shall be discharged, applied, or allowed to enter any reservoir or watercourse."

DOT officials have suggested the local concerns are overblown. Two years ago, a DOT regional director, Jack Williams, advised Katz in a letter: "The department maintains that the use of herbicides, in general, and Accord XRT II in particular along this corridor, is an acceptable risk, based on the application method and best practices."