

From: Charles Still
Friends of the West River.Org
Regarding the West River in Jamaica, VT
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Dear Governor Douglas;

Re: Contested Fall Release of the West River in Jamaica VT Scheduled for September 26th,
Local Economy To Be Impacted, Jamaica VT.

We need your help. I am faxing some one thousand plus signatures and an article from the Rutland Herald that highlights the troubles we are having. Please help us convene a forum to reasonably discuss and solve these issues. State Agencies are enacting policy changes that greatly impacts tourism and the local economy without the necessary public oversight.

Over the last decade, actions by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), (who manage Ball Mountain Dam on the West River), and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VANR), have significantly reduced scheduled opportunities for whitewater boating tourists to enjoy the West River in Jamaica VT. This loss of scheduled releases has had a negative economic impact on an area already hard hit by the global recession.

The West River in Jamaica, VT is one of the premier whitewater rivers in New England, and at one time hosted the Olympic Trials for whitewater paddling. In the past there have been two full weekends of whitewater releases starting in April and a two-day release in the fall.

While participants are hopeful for a large turn out, the one-day release scheduled discourages many to attend this event.

Historically, a scheduled two-day Fall release has drawn several thousand attendees to enjoy the river. A 2005 study, paid for in part by the Town of Jamaica, conservatively estimated a \$440,000 positive economic impact to Jamaica and surrounding communities for the two day event. The economic loss of reducing the release by one day is \$147,973 amounting to a 34% reduction in revenue to the local economy.

Several organizations including; The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), American White Water, New England Flow, Friends of the West River, and many volunteers have been attempting to work with the ACOE to enhance the recreational and economic opportunities provided by the existence of the dam.

Charles Still from the FriendsOfTheWestRiver.org states “The reduction in scheduled paddling days on the West River has a serious impact on Jamaica and the surrounding communities. Since limiting the release to a one-day event, attendance is down. The total loss to the community is easily in excess of a million dollars of lost tourism revenue since the initial

cancellation of the 2nd day of the fall release in 2003. I am also disappointed in the VANR who is using bureaucratic posturing to avoid working with the various interested parties to find agreeable solutions.

The VANR and ACOE need to be held accountable to the citizens of Vermont and the country. In 2009 over a thousand whitewater enthusiasts won't be visiting the West River. The mismanagement of this resource could not come at a worse time for an area already struggling in a down turning economy. We need solutions that support tourism and generate direct revenue for local businesses and tax revenue for the local and state economy."

After significant discussions last fall and this winter, paddlers, including representatives from AMC, New England Flow, American Whitewater, Friends of the West River, commercial rafting companies, and concerned citizens questioned the planned release change and sought a solution that would support public use of the West River. Despite the feedback both public agencies were receiving the Fall Release is still scheduled for only one day.

The Friends of the West River has collected over a thousand signatures and will be forwarding them to the Governors office. "We are hopeful that we can get local and state politicians involved in this issue." said Still.

More information online at
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From the Rutland Herald September 19, 2009
By Susan Smallheer

Regarding the Fall Release of water on the West River, comments by Phillip Morrison, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

Morrison said he was skeptical that the economic impact was as great as the group claimed.

Kayakers and canoeists aren't big spenders or partiers, he said.

"It's because of the fish; and the fish are winning," he said.

"the cutback was really the decision of the Agency of Natural Resources, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service."

- Phillip Morrison, U.S. Army Corps ranger at Ball Mountain

These comments are most interesting and display exactly why we need public hearings on this issue.

The comment on the Economic impact is the most amazing given the fact that the only scientifically valid study that has been done on the West River is the 2005 Economic Impact Study by Crane Associates, LLC.

The June 2008 Basin Management Plan for the West River published by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Explicitly States: "no site specific flow studies have been conducted to define impacts of whitewater releases in the West River."

The Economic Impact Study, which was partially funded by the Town of Jamaica, has a 95% confidence level and was completed by Crane Associates, LLC of Burlington VT.

www.CraneAssociates.us.

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The Fall Release cutback is quite simply not about the fish. Natural rain events occur dozens of times on the West River throughout the year and especially in the fall. A statistical analysis of these rain events over several years of data shows that 85% of them are of a higher rate of flow change than the scheduled fall release.

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Yes, it's the bureaucratic shuffle, who's on first? Despite no one being accountable thousands of visitors no longer come to stay in Jamaica VT.

Charles Still www.FriendsofTheWestRiver.org