

PRESS RELEASE:

Troubled local economy dealt a new blow by Vermont State and Federal Agencies – Jamaica, VT

For the past four decades, over a thousand visitors flocked to Jamaica, VT each spring for the drawdown of the Ball Mountain Dam Reservoir. They won't be visiting this year.

The Spring whitewater release at the West River means sold-out campsites at Jamaica State Park, "No Vacancy" signs at local inns, spaghetti supper fundraisers for the church, and parking fees and a food wagon that support the local school. This year, there will be few, if any visitors.

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 river. 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. Historically there have been two full weekends of whitewater releases starting in April and a two day release in the fall.

Last fall the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) announced that the late April releases would be moved several weeks earlier, to a time of year when Jamaica State Park is not yet open to the public. As with past cutbacks to scheduled releases, the ACOE and VANR provided no specific flow studies or monitoring data from the West River indicating that releases over the last 40 years have had any impact on the river's ecology.

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 spring release was scheduled early, weeks before the Jamaica State Park was open.

Then, in a surprise announcement made the last week of March, the ACOE announced the releases would occur not on a weekend at all, but mid-week from April 6-10.

The ACOE then went ahead and released the water on April 1st without notice – a week earlier than even their midweek schedule had indicated. All of these decisions were made unilaterally without consulting with any of the organizations, including the local community that had been working with them over the past two decades.

Kevin Colburn, National Stewardship Director of American Whitewater hopes a solution can be

worked out. “It is extremely likely that solutions exist that would support salmon recovery, flood control, and recreational enjoyment of the West River. We hope that the ACOE and VANR will work collaboratively with paddlers to explore those solutions. We will continue to advocate for good communication, and good decision making based on good data.”

An online website www.FriendsofTheWestRiver.org has been started along with a petition in reaction to the ongoing situation. Charles Still, creator of the website notes: “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 on April 25th and 26th. The mismanagement of this river 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. ”

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