



Essex

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Next Year's Raft Race Will Not End In Essex

By Tom Juergens

Essex will be spared, or denied (depending on your point of view) the raft race next year.

Coast Guard Lieutenant Michael Conway was in charge of Coast Guard operations during this year's race. He met last Thursday with the raft race committee, state police, and Department of Environmental Protection officials and concluded the race was unsafe and too hard to control. Conway has sent his recommendation to the Coast Guard's district commander in New York.

The recommendation suggests that the race be moved up river and end somewhere north of East Haddam, and that it be held outside the river channel, which would keep it better separated from other river traffic.

Conway said reviewing the race is standard procedure, but since the raft race is the biggest race the Coast Guard patrols, the review had to include representatives from all the agencies involved.

"The location of the race is being moved because ending up

at Notts Island is becoming hazardous. We need a place that's easier to end at, with greater crowd control. The majority of the people in the race cooperated, but there were a significant few that didn't, enough to make us feel that a gross accident is waiting to happen," Conway said.

Coast Guard and DEP officials complained of having to pull drunken swimmers from the river and turn back overloaded boats, canoes, and rafts trying to reach the post-race party on Nott's Island.

Lieutenant Randolph Dill of the state Department of Environmental Protection said that race organizers have been given general guidelines to follow in their search for a new beginning and ending points, and that ultimately, the Coast Guard will rule on the race. Those guidelines include a site "with far less boating traffic" and a shore-based ending point.

"In Essex, just the normal boating traffic on the weekend is unbelievable," said Dill. "We've been fortunate not to have any deaths."

Raft race organizer Ken Fischburg said the raft race committee is considering other locations "a couple of miles up the river" but could not name any specific locations.

"We're not very happy," Fischburg said, "but the problem is that there is always a small amount of people that do in fact cause problems for the people in Essex. I thought the Coast Guard and the police could work and we could all put some more effort into control, but it's too much

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Race Sent Up River

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Fischburg said of next year's race, "It's the same people, same river and everything, it's just that Nott's Island is a beautiful place. Those 5,000 people have the best time of the summer in that race."

William Winterer, owner of the Griswold Inn and outspoken opponent of the race said, "I live right on North Cove and the debris from the last three raft races still lies on the Great Meadow. These kids abandon their rafts and really pollute our Great Meadow. I don't think those people add anything to our town."