

100 Entries Are Due

For River Raft Race

1980
About 100 home-made rafts are to start off East Hampton's Hurd State Park tomorrow morning in the seventh annual Connecticut River Raft Race.

The four-and-a-half mile race will start at 10 a.m. and rafts are expected to start coming into the finishing line off Haddam's Haddam Meadows State Park at about 1 p.m.

The Coast Guard, one of three agencies patrolling the river race, is warning mariners to stay away from the stretch of river between the two parks, which will be closed to river traffic from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

The closure means that tugboats and barges will be strictly banned from the area, for safety reasons, according to Lt. Commander Michael Conway, the captain of the port in New London and the Coast Guard officer supervising the guard's patrol.

The smaller, pleasure boats will be allowed to pass according to conditions on the river, he said.

And spectator boats will be allowed to follow the race, but required to stay out

of the rafts' and patrol boats' way. The patrols will strictly enforce a ban on speeding and creating wakes, which have caused safety problems for past raft races.

Those who violate the traffic ban would be liable to a \$250 fine, Conway said.

All spectator craft are to be at anchor when the race starts, since that time is generally hectic and potentially dangerous, he said.

The Coast Guard is expected to provide two patrol boats, and half a dozen CG Auxiliary boats to patrol the race.

The state Department of Environmental Protection and the State Police Department's emergency services division will also send several boats each to patrol the race.

Starting months ago, race organizers submitted rafts of applications for the race's approval. Members of the State Police and Coast Guard had opposed the race's approval, citing safety problems and the guard's shortage of patrol boats. But the problems were ironed out.

Organizers had also planned to run the race from Middletown's Harborpark to Haddam Meadows Park, but abandoned the former starting site because of prospective fees. Race organizer Ken Fischburg said the city had discussed charging the race for police and fire department patrols, and that state police had opposed the Harborpark starting site for traffic reasons.

Fischburg applauded the state and the DEP for their cooperation in allowing use of the two parks at no charge.

The race organizers seek to cut costs to increase revenues, which are donated to several children's charities, he said.

Post-race festivities will be held in the Haddam Meadows State Park until shortly before sundown. Along with concessions selling lemonade and food, race organizers plan for several bands to play there, Fischburg said.

The organizers are providing liability insurance, patrols, sanitary facilities, and clean-up work at the park.

Spectators are to gather at Hurd State Park to watch the race start, but East Haddam police said they would have no involvement in the race. Patrols are to be provided by the state and the organizers.

Though the starting line's shift may have created problems for racers seeking to launch their rafts, the shift shortened the racecourse from 10 to 4.5 miles, reducing safety hazards.