

Raft Race Could Be Closed To Spectators

By Roberta Rebold

ESSEX - Whether next year's Connecticut River Raft Race should be closed to pleasure boats and prohibited from ending at Nott's Island will be discussed between Coast Guard, State Police and Department of Environmental Protection representatives Thurs-

day, August 14.

Although most racers were orderly and adhered to safety regulations, some pleasure boaters didn't, and problems developed towards the end of the day when on-land spectators tried to get to Nott's Island. "Many people were intoxicated and tried to get across

without proper equipment," said Lieutenant Michael Conway, the Coast Guard coordinator for the sixth annual raft race.

In addition, said Conway, boat overcrowding was widespread and many boat operators broke state regulations when they accepted money to transport passengers

without providing required safety devices.

A Coast Guard permit is required to hold the race and under next year's permit Conway would like to prohibit pleasure craft from traveling down the river.

However, the Coast Guards main purpose is to oversee boating safety matters, while the state has jurisdiction over the island, from which most raft race problems stem, Conway said.

If at next week's meeting, the State Police and DEP are adamant about not permitting use of Nott's Island, Conway will request that they notify the Coast Guard district commander in New York City with their recommendations.

DEP Coordinator of Boating Enforcement and Special Services Lieutenant Randolph Dill will at the meeting offer alternatives for ending raft race problems. Establishing a shoreline-based ending point for the race or starting the

race further up the river, where there is less boat traffic, are two possible solutions, said Dill.

Although several race ending sites have been discussed, Dill said no final decisions have been reached.

Like Conway, Dill stressed that problems did not occur during the race, but afterwards, when people were drinking heavily and traveling back and forth to Nott's island.

"There were numerous safety problems. We were pulling people out of the water, canoes and boats were half full of water and many adults and children had no life preservers," said Dill, who will present photographs of these violations at the meeting.

No final action will be taken at the meeting, which is intended as a discussion period. Any recommendations resulting from the meeting will be made by the state to the Coast Guard district office in New York City, said Dill.

Annual Raft Race Elicits Complaints

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Shoreline Clinic spokesperson Carolyn Parmelee said the night of the race could have been any other busy Saturday night at the clinic. The average caseload at the saw was "pretty calm, compared clinic has been running around 40 or 50 a night, she estimated. There were about 60 cases the night of the race, she said.

"There were eight or nine cases definitely related to the race," she said. "I don't think it was any drastic increase."

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