

GAZ 2-4-81

River Raft Race Is Up The Creek Without A Site

By Tom Juergens

The Connecticut River Raft Race could sink before it gets anywhere near the river unless beginning and ending sites north of the East Haddam bridge are found, and race organizer Ken Fischburg says he needs "people to come forth with ideas" on where to stage the event this summer.

Because Coast Guard and state police officials feel the race is "too much of an effort to control" in the southern section of the river, "they won't let us end it on Nott's Island," Fischburg said last week. "We need someone to offer private sites. The problem is not in petitioning for, but in finding sites." For the past six years, the race began in Deep

River and ended on Nott's Island, across from Essex.

Fischburg said the decision to prohibit the race from the lower, more congested section of the river means its seven-mile course will have to be run somewhere between lower Middletown and Haddam.

Officials in Middletown, Haddam, East Haddam, and East Hampton, have not yet been approached by race organizers, but a *Gazette* survey of town officials found that the west side of the river is the most likely place for the race to be held if public lands are to be used.

The state-owned Haddam Meadows is "basically good solid ground if it's not flooded," said

(Continued On Page 13A)

Is The Raft Race Up The Creek?

(Continued From Page 1A)

Haddam First Selectman Lawrence Conti, although there are stipulations that prohibit financial transactions there, including the sale of intoxicating beverages. The stipulations were put on its

use by the person who donated it to the state.

Two sites owned by the city of Middletown, the 15-acre Harbor Park and the Town Farms Park (which is not officially a park), are possible sites, said the Middletown Park and Recreation Depart-

ment's Assistant Director Craig Schroeder, providing "all officials" clear them for the race's use.

However, town officials on the east side of the river were not receptive to the possibility of the race being held in their towns. East Haddam First Selectman Douglas Ferrary went so far as to oppose it in a letter to Coast Guard and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) officials two weeks ago.

Ferrary said he "would not tolerate" the termination of the race along any of East Haddam's shore because "we're not equipped in town to accommodate such an event." And if state approval is granted for the DEP-owned

boat launch area in East Haddam, Ferrari said he would also oppose the use of that land, as he would oppose the use of any private land.

"They have a picnic and parties and it's one of those things that we just can't handle," Ferrari said.

East Hampton's chairman of the Board of Selectmen, George Fowler, said there is no feasible spot for the race in that town except the state-owned Hurd Park and one town-owned road that leads to the river's edge. While there are numerous private lands along the river in East Hampton, "I don't imagine (the owners) would go for any kind of conflagration like that," he said.

Page 13A The Gazette February 4, 1981