

Great Raft Race Is On!

Haddam To Be Finish Line

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GAZ

By Tom Juergens

ESSEX — The Great Seventh Connecticut River Raft Race is on, and applications are already being sent to race organizer Ken Fischburg's Norwich home from people ready to put their rafts and crews against all comers. This year's new ten-mile course from Middletown to the Haddam Meadows state park is about three miles longer than the old Deep River-Essex course.

After six years of ending the

race in Essex waters, officials from the Coast Guard, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and state police met in New London last fall and recommended that the race if it was ever to be held again, be moved upriver to end north of the East Haddam bridge. The recommendation to avoid the more congested, lower stretches of the river was upheld by the Coast Guard district command in New York City.

The number of entries in the

race has grown from just a few in the beginning, to a few dozen, to about 100 rafts last year. At \$25 per raft plus \$5 per crew member, last year's race raised about \$2,000 for charity, while also raising hackles on some Essex residents and businessmen as spectators and participants filled the town.

After "a lot of legwork," this year's race is a definite thing, he added. The DEP has issued a

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Raft Race Has New Location

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permit for the race, and, in addition, Fischburg said, "I would like to thank Haddam First Selectman Lawrence Conti and Cromwell First Selectman Paul Harrington for their cooperation."

Beginning three days before the race, rafts will be launched from the Cromwell Outboard Motorboat Club. From there, they will float downstream and anchor off Middletown. The race is scheduled to start, by cannon shot, at 10 a.m. Saturday, August 1. The entry fee rose to \$30 this year, but crew members will still be charged \$5. T-shirts, food, and soft drinks will be available at the race, but no alcoholic beverages, Fischburg said.

Some local concern stems from people who are "dead set against it," and others are concerned about a "mass intrusion," but the constraints put on the event by the DEP should avoid any trouble, Conti said.

While the Haddam Meadows state park shoreline is lined with shrubs, there is some minor concern about it being an environmentally sound landing place, but Conti said he has heard of "no real environmental opposition."

Long-time raft race Richard

Harding of East Haddam was concerned about broken glass "from parties years ago" at the landing site, and added that the old landing spot on Notts Island in Essex was easier to clean because it's sandier. While race participants were the major impact on Nott's Island's environment, it may be the spectators that impact the Haddam Meadows the most, he added. Since there's only one road to the meadows, police should be able to control the crowd easily, Harding said. Any rafts "left derelict" will cost its owners \$50 in fines and disqualification from future races. No glass is allowed, and all rafts must carry a litter sack.

"We want our races to continue into the coming years; don't destroy, through bad public relations, what we've built," the rules state.

Proceeds from the race will go to local charities that deal with children. The Newington Children's Hospital, Big Brothers and Sisters of the Shoreline, and Ducks Unlimited, and environmentalists and sportsmen's groups, have been past recipients of raft race charities.

The captains' meeting will be held Saturday, July 12 at noon on the Old Saybrook firemen's field, when the rules for this year's race will be reiterated by organizers. That date is also the deadline for entries.

Anyone interested in participating in this year's race should write to: Kenneth Fischburg, 3 Meadow Lane, Norwich, CT, 06360.

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