

# MID-STREAM NEWS



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## Coalition Wins Victory to Protect River Winnepesaukee Dredging Defeated

A LONG-DORMANT ARMY CORPS project to dredge and dam sections of the Winnepesaukee River re-appeared quite suddenly toward the end of the legislative session in NH. Inserted into the capital budget just before the bill went to the House floor for a vote, the \$6.4 million project passed the House and passed the Senate Capital Budget Committee before being killed on the Senate floor by a wide margin. Opposition to the project was led by the Friends of the Winnepesaukee River and a loose coalition of other groups and

legislators including the MRWC, the Audubon Society of NH, the Loon Preservation Committee, the Tilton Conservation Commission, and Tilton Representative Kenneth Randall.

The proposed project was based on a 1970 report by the Army Corps of Engineers studying measures to reduce flooding of Lake Winnepesaukee and the Winnepesaukee River. The unimplemented report was dusted off and updated after flooding in 1984. The proposal included wholesale dredging of sections of the river between Tilton and Laconia totalling nearly three miles of artificial channel, the construction of a bottom-hinged dam at the outlet to Silver Lake, and modifications to several bridges and dams for a total projected cost of \$6.4 million (\$4.8 of federal funds and

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## Loon EIS Shows Negative Impacts on Water Quality and Water Supply

### *Supplemental Environmental Review to be Issued*

A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT statement (DEIS) for a proposed expansion of the Loon Mountain Ski Area along the banks of the Pemigewasset River in Lincoln, New Hampshire has come under fire from state organizations, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the MRWC. The expansion, first proposed in late 1986, includes 13 new trails, three lifts, a 1,000 car parking lot on the banks of the river, two lodges, a golf course, and 500 condominiums on 930 acres of public land in the White Mountain National Forest and private land adjacent to the present Loon Mountain ski area.

After preliminary environmental study and some public input, the Forest Service announced in November 1987 that it would grant the permit subject to several conditions. After loud public outcry about the inadequate information available upon which to make a decision, the Forest Service agreed to pursue a full-scale environmental impact review as required by federal law. The DEIS was issued in February 1989 and the Forest Service recommended allowing the expansion with mitigation measures.

In April the MRWC issued extensive comments on the DEIS, endorsing the proposed no-action alternative and opposing

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Source to the Sea canoe trip  
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## The Mighty 4 Mile River Park in Lowell



*Nate Tufts joins Gov. Gregg in canoe trip send-off at Franconia Notch State Park*

AN AFTERNOON DRIVE along the riverside boulevard in Lowell reveals an astonishing complex of recreation, relaxation, and sport, all keyed to the Merrimack River. Many city agencies and citizen groups deserve great credit for the careful planning, persistence, and funding of the rowing and sailing clubs, the programs for the elderly

and youth of the city, and the landscaped walks, bandstands and other amenities too numerous to mention.

The marvelous fact one tends to overlook or take for granted is the river itself. All our work upstream in New Hampshire aimed at reducing pollution and maintaining a healthy flow will continue to pay-off for the hundreds of thousands of citizens who play along side and drink the Merrimack as it bounds a 4-mile urban playground in Massachusetts.

We can be thankful as well for the good environmental start made upstream in New Hampshire by MRWC member and first year governor, Judd Gregg. Imagine the devastating blow to the quality of life in the valley if the river were allowed to deteriorate...or had never been cleaned up. Will swimming be next?

—Nate Tufts  
President, MRWC

## Winnepesaukee dredging

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\$1.6 state funds). Money to replace the Tilton railroad bridge was appropriated in 1985 (\$400,000) but never spent. The Corps proposal would reduce flooding along the river in Tilton and Franklin by up to 70%. However, according to the Corps' own figures, 85% of that reduction could be achieved at no cost simply by altering the spring fill-up and fall draw-down schedules of Lake Winnepesaukee.

At the Senate Capital Budget Committee hearing in late April, the DES Water Resources Division spoke in favor of the \$1.2 million expenditure, citing the need to address flooding and the imminent lapse of the \$4.8 million of federal funds. (MRWC argued that indiscriminate use of available state funds is not a worthy state policy. No amount of federal money can be considered a benefit if it is expended to damage the environment.) Submitting testimony in opposition were the NH Fish and Game Department (the Commission voted to oppose the project in 1986), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lake Winnepesaukee Association, Clean Waters Association, Friends of the Winnepesaukee River, NH Association of Conservation Commissions, the Loon Preservation Committee, Tilton Conservation Commission, Representatives Kenneth Randall (Tilton Town Meeting

suggested adding the \$1.2 million to the Land Conservation Investment Program), Audubon Society of NH, and the MRWC.

Opponents argued that 1) a 60% reduction in flooding needed no new funds and would not significantly disrupt the river or the lakes; 2) an environmental impact statement had not been prepared to assess anticipated adverse impacts on fish and wildlife resources and habitats; 3) the critical Tioga wetlands area at the outlet of Silver Lake would be severely negatively affected by the dredging and new dam; 4) historic and archeological resources needed to be assessed before dredging; 5) future maintenance dredging at state expense would be needed; and 6) that any cost overruns would be paid by the state. While the proposal for the state match was for \$1.2 million, the rules clearly stated that all cost overruns are the responsibility of the state. The Corps refused to make a "final estimate" of the cost until NH was firmly committed to the project.

MRWC congratulates the majority in the State Senate who voted to kill the project on the Senate floor and kept it out of the conference committee report eventually signed into law by Governor Gregg. Special thanks also go to Ken Norton and the Friends of the Winnepesaukee River who spent many long hours toiling on the issue in the face of threats of physical harm and other forms of harass-

## Loon EIS Negative

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the two expansion alternatives. Many other organizations, including the Audubon Society of NH, the EPA, the Conservation Law Foundation, and the Society for the Protection of NH Forests took similar positions. The DEIS led the MRWC to conclude that "the quality of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River is already stressed; the risk of compounding that stress by issuing the Loon permit outweighs the potential economic benefits. No expansion should occur unless there is no significant impact on the water and wildlife resources of the basin. The resource is simply too valuable. Decisions affecting our environment should strike a balance between natural resource protection and economic benefit. In this case, the economic benefit that has occurred, and will continue to occur, has already tipped the balance against the river and its environment."

MRWC and many other organizations have expressed concern that there would not be enough water available from the Pemigewasset River and Loon Pond for snowmaking, town drinking water supplies, and fish habitat.

MRWC is also concerned about existing inadequacies of the present sewage treatment facility in Lincoln—problems which would be exacerbated by expansion at Loon. The NH Department of Environmental Services has confirmed that up to 250,000 gallons per day of partially treated effluent can't be accounted for and may be leaking into the ground and the river.

Reacting to these and other concerns expressed in the public comments of the DEIS, the Forest Service announced in late May that a supplemental EIS would be prepared before the agency makes a final determination on the proposed expansion. The supplemental report is due out in late September and the final decision is scheduled for late spring. The MRWC is participating in the Joint Review Committee overseeing the study and will be monitoring and commenting on the final report. ■

