

# Environmental Groups Oppose River Dredging

By TAD SHANNON  
Monitor Staff Writer

Environmental groups hope to sink a plan to dredge the Winnepesaukee River when the Senate votes on a capital budget, probably next Tuesday.

The budget includes \$1.2 million for the state's share of the project, which would be supplemented by \$4.8 million by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The state's Water Resources Division argues the plan will help prevent periodic floods in Franklin and other communities along the river.

The division says the Legislature must allocate the money now or lose the federal match.

"It is something that should have been done long before this," said Delbert Downing, the head of the division. "You are getting a bargain for your money. I don't know how you are going to refuse it."

Environmentalists say the plan would destroy fish and wildlife habitat and is unnecessary. They have been joined by the state's Fish and Game Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"It seems to us to be a boondoggle and mismanagement," said Kirk Stone, director of environmental affairs for the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

"We feel the proposal would change the character of the river and we are not sure the benefits are worth the expenditure," said Lauren Noether of the Tilton-based Friends of the Winnepesaukee River.

Versions of the dredging plan have been around since the late 1950s, most recently last year. But the state has never come up with the money. After the plan died in the Legislature last year, then-Gov. John Sununu convinced the Corps to set aside the money for one more year.

This year, Gov. Judd Gregg did not include money for the project in his capital budget. But it was added, by an amendment, in the House. It received little attention until now, and environmentalists complained about the process.

"There was not a hearing on the merits of the project in the House," said Marjorie Swope, of the New Hampshire Association of Conserva-

the river from its source at Lake Winnepesaukee in Lakeport to Franklin. The work would affect the towns of Lakeport, Laconia, Lochmere, Northfield, Tilton and Franklin. The proposal also includes installing a hinge dam just south of Silver Lake, downstream of the Route 140 bridge.

Downing said the project would deepen "bottlenecks" in the river that can cause flooding.

At hearings before the Senate last week, environmental groups and representatives from the state's Fish and Game Department and the U.S. Wildlife Service criticized the plan as unnecessary and harmful.

They pointed to reports by the Corps that said 85 percent of the benefits of the plan could be accomplished by regulating the level of Lake Winnepesaukee and the river with six existing dams.

But Downing said the water resources division, which regulates the level of Lake Winnepesaukee and the river, is also responsible for the recreational uses of the lake. He said dramatic lowering of the lake would affect homeowners, boaters and other users of the lake.

Environmentalists worry the dam would damage the Tioga wetlands, just south of Silver Lake, where a bald eagle has wintered for the past three years. Other eagles have also been spotted in the region, according to Stone of the Audubon Society.

Stone said a dam below Silver Lake could slow the flow of the river, causing it to freeze in the winter and cutting off the eagle's source of fish.

"If it freezes, then eagles would not winter there," he said.

Vernon Lang, assistant supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, predicted the dredging would eliminate 50 percent to 80 percent of the fish in the affected parts of the river.

Stone said the dredging "is diametrically opposed to what we need for fish and wildlife. You want a crooked stream, with boulders and snags that create an impediment to flow and habitat to fish."

But Downing said the dam would be built before the dredging to keep the water level up at the Tioga wetlands. And he disputed that the water would freeze.

"I don't think they are going to notice any difference in the water," he said. "Our job is protecting the envi-

Environmental groups hope to sink a plan to dredge the Winnepesaukee River when the Senate votes on a capital budget, probably next Tuesday.

The budget includes \$1.2 million for the state's share of the project, which would be supplemented by \$4.8 million by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The state's Water Resources Division argues the plan will help prevent periodic floods in Franklin and other communities along the river.

The division says the Legislature must allocate the money now or lose the federal match.

"It is something that should have been done long before this," said Delbert Downing, the head of the division. "You are getting a bargain for your money. I don't know how you are going to refuse it."

Environmentalists say the plan would destroy fish and wildlife habitat and is unnecessary. They have been joined by the state's Fish and Game Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"It seems to us to be a boondoggle and mismanagement," said Kirk Stone, director of environmental affairs for the Audubon Society of New Hampshire.

"We feel the proposal would change the character of the river and we are not sure the benefits are worth the expenditure," said Lauren Noether of the Tilton-based Friends of the Winnepesaukee River.

Versions of the dredging plan have been around since the late 1950s, most recently last year. But the state has never come up with the money. After the plan died in the Legislature last year, then-Gov. John Sununu convinced the Corps to set aside the money for one more year.

This year, Gov. Judd Gregg did not include money for the project in his capital budget. But it was added, by an amendment, in the House. It received little attention until now, and environmentalists complained about the process.

"There was not a hearing on the merits of the project in the House," said Marjorie Swope, of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions.

"Apparently the Water Resources Division managed to have someone submit it," said Ken Norton of Friends of the Winnepesaukee River. "It was intentionally done in that manner to slide it in."

But Downing said that charge was ridiculous. He said he discussed the project in a House appropriations subcommittee, which was considering the capital budget.

"Every time they go into session, people are caught by surprise by something," he said.

The plan calls for dredging about three miles along seven sections of

the river from its source at Lake Winnepesaukee in Lakeport to Franklin. The work would affect the towns of Lakeport, Laconia, Lochmere, Northfield, Tilton and Franklin. The proposal also includes installing a hinge dam just south of Silver Lake, downstream of the Route 140 bridge.

Downing said the project would deepen "bottlenecks" in the river that can cause flooding.

At hearings before the Senate last week, environmental groups and representatives from the state's Fish and Game Department and the U.S. Wildlife Service criticized the plan as unnecessary and harmful.

They pointed to reports by the Corps that said 85 percent of the benefits of the plan could be accomplished by regulating the level of Lake Winnepesaukee and the river with six existing dams.

But Downing said the water resources division, which regulates the level of Lake Winnepesaukee and the river, is also responsible for the recreational uses of the lake. He said dramatic lowering of the lake would affect homeowners, boaters and other users of the lake.

Environmentalists worry the dam would damage the Tioga wetlands, just south of Silver Lake, where a bald eagle has wintered for the past three years. Other eagles have also been spotted in the region, according to Stone of the Audubon Society.

Stone said a dam below Silver Lake could slow the flow of the river, causing it to freeze in the winter and cutting off the eagle's source of fish.

"If it freezes, then eagles would not winter there," he said.

Vernon Lang, assistant supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, predicted the dredging would eliminate 50 percent to 80 percent of the fish in the affected parts of the river.

Stone said the dredging "is diametrically opposed to what we need for fish and wildlife. You want a crooked stream, with boulders and snags that create an impediment to flow and habitat to fish."

But Downing said the dam would be built before the dredging to keep the water level up at the Tioga wetlands. And he disputed that the water would freeze.

"I don't think they are going to notice any difference in the water," he said. "Our job is protecting the environment. We are not going to be draining a swamp or wetland."

State Sen. Wayne King, a Democrat who represents Tilton and Sanbornton, said he'll propose an amendment taking the money out of the budget when it comes before the Senate. King said it would be a tough fight, in part because Downing, a former senator, is well-respected by his colleagues.

"If the feds want to throw away money, that's their business," King said. "But I don't think we should participate."

