

Vermont Environmental Report

Champlain-Richelieu Flood Control Dam Faces Stiff Opposition in Vermont

Over the past six weeks, skepticism, if not outright opposition, has been growing in Vermont in response to a proposed \$16 million flood control structure on the Richelieu River at St. Jean, Quebec.

A proposal to construct a gated water control dam was a principal recommendation of an international study team report to the Canadian-American International Joint Commission (IJC). This international study team, known as the International Champlain-Richelieu Board, began its studies in May 1975. In December 1977 the Board completed its work and submitted its findings and recommendations. The report of the International Champlain-Richelieu Board runs to several volumes of text and cost \$2 million to prepare.

The International Joint Commission is presently reviewing the findings and recommendations of the study team report. Sometime in the next several months the International Joint Commission will decide whether or not to accept the recommendations of the international study team, including the principal recommendation to construct a \$16 million flood control dam. Should the IJC accept this recommendation, the fate of the flood control structure will still have to be decided in Ottawa and Washington D.C. in the appropriations process.

The first high Vermont official to break silence in response to the proposed flood control structure was outgoing Environmental Secretary Martin Johnson. On February 28 Johnson recorded his opposition to the flood control structure. According to a Times-Argus report of March 2, "Johnson said that nothing more than the dredging of some sediment deposits that have built up at the outflow of Lake Champlain could be allowed. He said that any further tampering with the big lake would greatly endanger the 30,000

acres of wetlands that lie along the lake's shore mostly in Vermont. The wetlands are the breeding ground for much of the life in and around the lake." Johnson was quoted by the Times-Argus as saying, "I don't want to see our wetlands destroyed for flood plain development."

On March 29, Congressman James Jeffords, fresh from a meeting with Martin Johnson, expressed his opposition to the proposed flood control structure. Jeffords said that the flood control dam would be destructive to the environment of Lake Champlain and the environment of Vermont.

Vermont's two U.S. Senators, Robert Stafford and Patrick Leahy have both expressed reservations about the wisdom of building the proposed flood control structure. Neither Stafford nor Leahy are as yet willing to go as far as to announce their outright opposition to the project.

Victor Maerki of Senator Stafford's Washington D.C. office said that Stafford is skeptical about any solution to the flooding problems on the Lake and the Richelieu River that provides a remedy for Canadians but which might hurt Vermont. Said Maerki, "The Senator is not going to vote for any appropriation for the American share in building the flood control dam if the project is opposed by the State of Vermont."

Senator Leahy told the VER, "So far there has been nothing to convince me of the value of the flood control dam." Leahy reiterated this point in saying, "I have stated time and time again that I have never been convinced of the need for this dam."

Senator Leahy is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He wants to be sure that he has gathered enough information both pro and con to make an