

For Immediate Release

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Friendsofwestriver.org

Recreational  
Boating on West  
River, Vermont  
UPDATE

# Press Release

## Vermont Governor Douglas asks Agencies to Review Recreational Whitewater Releases

Local Economy Impacted in 2009 by Closure of Scheduled Releases

October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Changes in the scheduled whitewater releases on the West River at Jamaica Vermont curtailed many boating and rafting activities this past year. The loss of several important weekend releases is now being viewed as a drag on the local economy as Jamaica and the region misses the influx of over two thousand rafters and whitewater boaters from around New England.

Now, the controversy over the release of water from Ball Mountain Dam for recreational boaters has gained the attention of Vermont Governor Douglas.

In a September 30<sup>th</sup> letter to Friends of the West River, Governor Douglas wrote: “Although it can be difficult to satisfy the various interests who care deeply about an issue such as this, I will continue to ask the professionals at the Agency of Natural Resources to carefully examine the science and thoughtfully consider the inputs of all interested parties.”

The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) announced changes to the spring 2009 dam releases on the West River in Jamaica, VT that severely impacted whitewater rafting, kayaking and recreational boating. After over thirty years of scheduled releases in the last calendar week of April, the ACOE moved the scheduled release two weeks earlier in the season to April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. This change impacted the Spring Recreational weekend for boaters, since Jamaica State Park, where the event is held, was closed. The Park serves the vital role of providing river access, camping, shuttles, and a meeting place for recreational boaters and kayakers.

It has been estimated that hundreds of thousands of dollars are generated by these release weekends. Beneficiaries include restaurants, recreational boating businesses, rafting companies, Jamaica State Park and the local schools - which offer parking for a fee next to the river.

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Kevin Colburn of American Whitewater suggested that this was the wrong year to be eliminating the traditional release schedule, “We have heard that tourism in Vermont has been impacted by higher fuel costs and reduced spending. These are not the economic times for local businesses to get hit with the withdrawal of a huge stimulus from such a large event”.

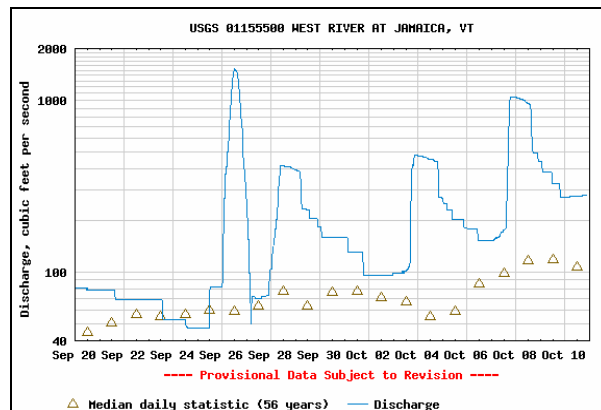
Charles Still, of Friends of the West River is frustrated. In a recent letter to Governor Douglas, Mr. Still wrote “Brian Fitzgerald of the VT Agency of Natural Resources will readily admit that there have been NO studies completed on the occasional scheduled releases of water on the river. When pressed for specific studies that have been used to come to the current conclusions and decisions which have limited releases on the river he previously shared several that were completed on other rivers with daily variation in flow, as often caused by hydro power generation. There is a significant difference between daily flow variation and 4 to 6 scheduled release events a year. Quite simply 4 or 6 scheduled releases a year have no more impact the West River than natural rain events.”

“The only significant difference between a rain event and a scheduled event on the West River in Jamaica VT is that over 2,000 tourists cannot show up for a random rain event.” In 2009 the spring release was lost which significantly impacted the local economy. There was a surprise release in July that paddlers had a 3 day notice of... several hundred attended, This fall the release, now limited to only 1 day, over 2000 paddlers attended. One Release day a year is a huge loss from a venue that once hosted the Olympic kayaking trials”

“The impact of the normal fall release on the river is very hypothetical, because a heavy rain or flood could cause the Army Corp to make a similar size release during our preferred weekend, nullifying any supposed benefits that they are trying to achieve, added Still. This past weekend, October 25, 2009 saw a huge rain event where the flow rapidly ramped on the river, periodic cycles of increased flow down any river basin is a normal event.

Representatives from American Whitewater and New England Flow are requesting the studies the ACOE is basing their changes and have had no response.

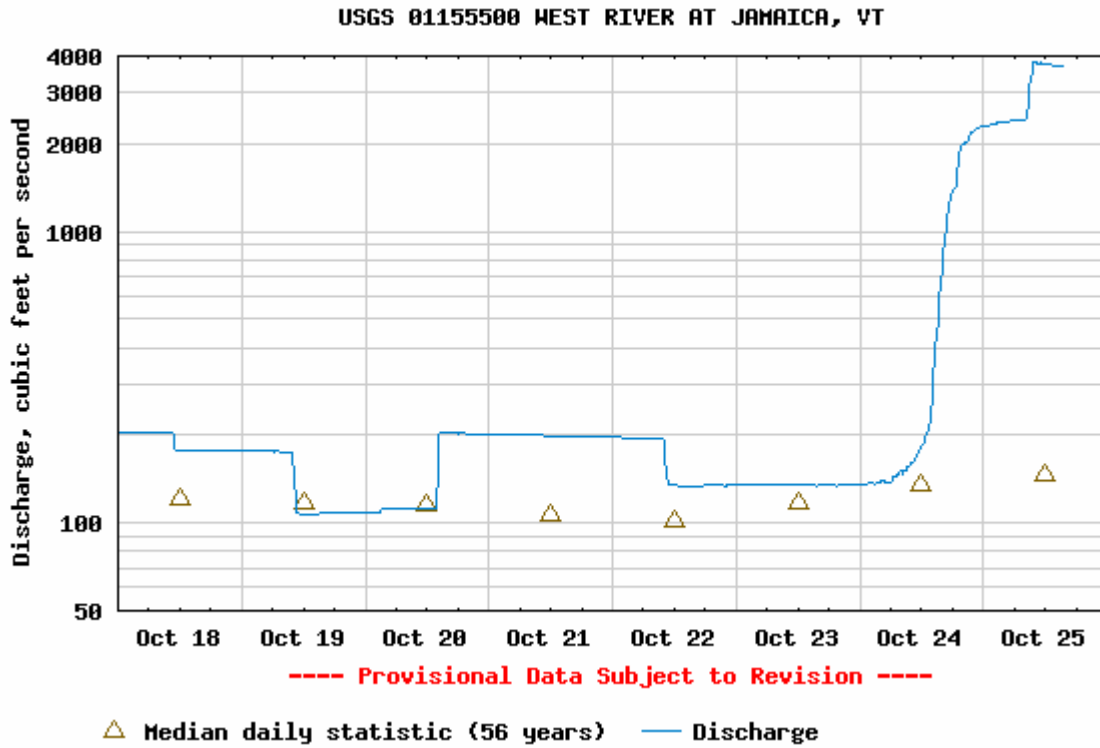
The aforementioned groups, along with individuals and other organizations have put together [www.friendsofthewestriver.org](http://www.friendsofthewestriver.org) website outlining the present issues at hand. The groups are



2009 Scheduled Release and Rain Events.

working collectively to restore scheduled flows to the river. So far attempts to work with the ACOE to supporting scheduled releases have been ignored.

More information on this topic can be received by contacting Charles Still at [chuck@friendsofthewestriver.org](mailto:chuck@friendsofthewestriver.org) or [Kevin@amwhitewater.org](mailto:Kevin@amwhitewater.org)



October 2009 Rain Event