

more pollution for the st. john ?

By JEFF DAVIES

The south branch of the Meduxnekeag River rises near the town of New Limerick, Maine. A few miles below New Limerick, still a small stream, it passes through Carey Mills, only eleven miles from the Canadian border. And it's in Carey Mills that the river picks up the effluent from the A. E. Staley starch mill and carries it across the Canadian border, through the town of Woodstock and into the St. John River — "the Rhine of North America."

Staley's has been operating the plant since 1967 but did not until this year apply for a license to discharge waste water. A hearing of this application came up in Houlton, Maine on September 21 before a tribunal of the Maine State Department of Environmental Protection. Staley's requested a license to discharge 576,000 gallons per day of potato grind water, 100,000 gallons per day of modified starch filtrate and wash water, and 45,000 gallons per day of cooling water into the river.

The hearing attracted about 150 people, both Americans and Canadians, and wore on for several hours until it was decided to adjourn it until November 2. A decision is not expected until next year. Brian Barnes, director of the environment section of the New Brunswick Department of Fisheries and Environment, read a letter from G.W.N. Cockburn, the minister of the department.

Cockburn's letter could hardly be described as a firm indictment of the practices of the Staley company although he did request that the river at least not be downgraded; "Providing the license issued by the Departmental Protection will ensure that the discharge from this company is adequately treated to maintain the B2 classification, then it is our opinion that the quality of the Meduxnekeag River will be improved. It is my understanding that the issuing of a license will enable your department to adequately control this discharge. On this basis we solicit a commitment from the State of Maine that any license issued as a result of this application include precise conditions ensure the discharge does not degrade water quality below the classification established by the State legislature."

Some of the others who spoke at the hearing appeared considerably more distraught than Cockburn at the plight of the river and considerably less confident that the Staley company would not allow the pollution to increase.

Mayor Ronald Moffatt of Woodstock said "pollution is a sin of ignorance and we must work to reduce the input of waste materials into our rivers. It is our opinion that any license allowed the A. E. Staley Company would negate the almost \$3,000,000 effort that is being made by the citizens of Houlton in the building of their pollution control centre." (Houlton is just across the border, several miles downstream from the plant.)

Mrs. Lawrence Gough of Portland Settlement complained that both wells on her property adjacent to the plant were polluted as the result of effluent. Blaine Lambert, a fisherman and guide from Houlton, said that this was the first year in the approximately 45 years he has fished the Meduxnekeag that he has failed to catch any trout. He blamed the death of sportfishing on the river on the pollution caused by the Staley plant.

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