

OUR BERKSHIRES 3/23/67

B STANDS FOR BENEFITS

By Morgan Bulkeley

AS A DIRECTOR of the Housatonic Watershed Association, I wish to go on record as endorsing a B classification for all county rivers. My first canoe trip on the Housatonic was in 1928, and now 39 years later my canoe is a short carry from its banks on the property that Oliver Wendell Holmes called "Canoe Meadows" because there for centuries the Indians beached their canoes. I have probably capsized in the river as much as any man and so offer my drippings as credentials.

Not as some, do I find the Housatonic River a disgrace. Rather I see it as an over-loaded, worn-out public utility that, for more than a century without charge, has been efficiently disposing of public sewage and industrial waste, for the most part unseen, unsung and unsmelled. The hidden tax that the public has been paying for these services is complete loss of the river for all other purposes. Now it is time to return it to higher uses.

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TIMES HAVE CHANGED with progress. Pittsfield has installed \$12 million worth of sewage facilities; technology is providing better means of waste treatment; and society and administration are inclined to revive the more natural and more numerous river resources. As tax-payers are underwriting their sewage problems, so are businesses assuming waste-treatment responsibilities that have too long been shunted upon the river.

I have recently seen documentaries on Hudson and Connecticut River pollution that made some of the viewers feel faint. Those

large interstate water-ways are truly Augean stables to be cleaned. Probably a halfway job is the best that can be expected.

In Berkshire, on the other-hand, we have no excuse for a halfway job or a C. The Housatonic, the Hoosic, the Green, the Konkapot and the Williams rivers should be brought to a B at every point as soon as technically and economically possible. Since this is a mountain-encircled county controlling all its own sources, no stream within it should be less than B. Our mountain fastness provides an opportunity to set a lofty example. Our streams should be fit for big trout and small boys.

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THE IDYLLIC STATE of the Housatonic, the "sherry-wine-eyed" clarity known to Oliver Wendell Holmes, may be very slowly achieved; but it will bring benefits, seen and unseen, to every resident. The rivers, outmoded as drains, can become recreational assets second only to the mountains. A county which boasts and depends upon fine recreation can rise or stagnate on the difference between B and C, best or second best.

To cite a specific example: The Housatonic from Pittsfield to the Green River confluence below Great Barrington has been classified by the state Division of Water Pollution Control to become C, which means, among other things, "suitable for wildlife, for fishing and for good esthetic value." That may be valid if one wants starlings, carp and oil-blackened fern tips. Class C, though better than the present D, would bring in more hydrologists than waterplants, frogs, mergansers and otters. In the long run, we can afford these better indicators.

Too long lack of understanding and simple indifference have

allowed a few businesses and individuals to defile public waterways. Now Class C means lower capital costs for the defilers than B; but B means more benefits for everybody.

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A CLASS B Housatonic would offer to 75,000 residents in the Pittsfield-Lenox-Lee population heart of the county the magnificent opportunity to create a multipurpose, greenbelt, waterway park extending five miles from the Holmes Road bridge in Pittsfield to the Wood's Pond Dam in Lenox. This is chiefly submarginal, flood-plain land, much of it protected by the Hatch Act from being filled, and therefore from being developed by builders.

If the three communities are unable or unwilling to undertake a riparian park, the state Department of Natural Resources should be invited in. A union of its October Mountain Forest with a clean stretch of the adjoining Housatonic River would be a marriage of postglacial acquaintances that would benefit generations to come.