

Walloomsac Pollution Protested by Biologist

4/11/64

A strong appeal to end pollution of the Walloomsac River by the Vermont Tissue Paper Co. Inc., was heard Tuesday night by Bennington Selectmen.

The appeal was made by J. Frederick Wohnus, a teacher of biology at Bennington College, who reported on various tests and observations he has made of the stream below the tissue-making plant. The plant discharges its process wastes into the stream, causing a heavy discoloration, a contamination which in Wohnus's view constitutes serious pollution.

Wohnus disputed a statement made two weeks ago by Atty. Francis E. Morrissey, spokesman for a special committee now managing the financially troubled firm, that the discharge of paper fibers into the river had been eliminated by the installation of special screening equipment.

Wohnus said there are significant quantities of fibers still going into the stream, and to prove his point he produced two gallon samples of river water, one a clear one taken from above the tissue plant dam, the other downstream from the plant. The latter was cloudy with suspended clays from the paper-making process, Wohnus said, and the filmy

sediment which was settled at the bottom of the gallon jug was fiber waste. When stirred up, the water became even cloudier.

Wohnus also offered to set up a microscope to show selectmen the paper fibers. The biologist noted that the stream bed for some distance below the tissue plant was covered with process waste sediment to a depth of several inches.

Wohnus then expressed concern over the fact that it has been a number of years since an anti-pollution classification had been instituted for the river, but that the tissue - making firm had yet to do anything about eliminating its pollution.

This, agreed selectman Richard Van Santvoord for the board, "has always been our position." He noted that the town had been required by the state Water Resources Board to build a \$2 million sewage treatment plant, but that "extension after extension" was being granted to the private industrial firm. He noted that a number of letters had been sent to the WRB expressing concern about the continued industrial pollution, but that only vague and noncommittal replies had been received.

Van Santvoord noted that the selectmen have no authority to or-

der the stream's clean-up. There was general agreement among the group, however, that the WRB has such authority.

Selectmen, Wohnus and several other residents who appeared with him then discussed how pressure could be brought on the WRB to stop the industrial pollution. One suggestion was the selectmen bring the matter to the attention of Gov. Philip H. Hoff. Another suggestion was that residents of the town write the state authorities asking for prompt action.

Wohnus noted that the type of pollution from the tissue plant was well known to the paper industry. He thought that some sort of filtration bed could be built to settle out the sediment before the process water was returned to the stream. He added that he was in correspondence with several agencies getting information on the proper pro-

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cedures to be used to deal with the problem and also on the biological effects on the stream of the process wastes.

Selectmen's Agent Mrs. Alma Langlois suggested that the WRB may already be speeding up action to clean up the stream. She said she understood from Treatment Plant Supt. Paul Kelley that several WRB technicians had been in the area last week.