

BIG RIDEAU LAKE ASSOCIATION

ENVIRONMENT SACRIFICED AS TAX DODGERS RUSH THROUGH CLOSING TAX LOOPHOLE

Entrepreneurs, investors and promoters from Western Canada and Bay Street are rushing to take advantage of a closing tax loophole, and the big losers are the environmentalists and users of the Rideau Canal, according to the Big Rideau Lake Association.

Michael Wilson's 1985 and 1986 budgets proposed to close a tax loophole under which wealthy investors buy house boats as tax write-offs, while third parties use the boats in large scale house boat rental operations.

Three Bouys HouseBoat Vacations is a company from Western Canada set up to exploit this tax break. Three Bouys has now moved eastward into the lucrative Ontario market, with a growing armada of houseboats, as more and more investors flock to the program. Last fall, scrambling to take advantage of a dispensation from Revenue Canada to keep the loophole open until the end of 1985, Three Bouys sold 118 houseboats to local and not-so-local investors, promising to operate them on the Rideau Canal, without first getting the proper approvals from environmental and other authorities.

After being turned down at Jones Falls, Three Bouys is now making a frantic effort to force their way into Big Rideau Lake.

The Rideau Canal has until now been maintained as one of Parks Canada's precious unspoiled treasures. Clear waters, loons, herons, fish spawning grounds, wild life wetlands and a peaceful haven for cottagers, residents, fishermen and other visitors are all at risk, as authorities are under pressure by business promoters to rush the deal through without the proper environmental assessments. The

house boats are already arriving by the trainload.

Friction is already developing between Three Bouys and local residents. People who saved up for years to buy a cottage or home on the lake are being portrayed as wealthy and selfish by promoters of the operation.

But in fact, all users of this national asset, from local fishermen, campers and canoeists to canal lock station visitors will be affected if the operation is approved. According to Big Rideau Lake Association, the only real beneficiaries will be the rich investors who use the boats as tax write-offs.

The customers, who must come up with about two thousand dollars to cover the cost of a week on one of these boats, may be in for a disappointment.

Prospective customers, lured to the scheme by brochures promising pristine wilderness and secluded bays, are not told about treacherous shoals, narrow, windy channels and basically no where to go. Unlike the Thousand Islands, there are almost no developed public facilities, docks, moorings or recreational areas on Big Rideau Lake, and those that do exist are already overcrowded.

Houseboat renters may find themselves with other houseboats, anchored in shallow, weedy bays with no facilities, listening to each other's blaring built-in stereos and watched from shore by unfriendly cottagers.

While the operator says "No Pollution", Big Rideau Lake Association has learned that soapy

bathwater and other effluents will be dumped directly into the lake from these houseboats.

The problems on the Trent-Severn canal system were so bad when Three Bouys started up there last summer that boaters eventually blockaded the canal in protest. Big Rideau Lake Association says Three Bouys should not be allowed into the Rideau Canal until they can demonstrate they've solved those problems. Three Bouys were turned back from a lake similar to Big Rideau, Lake Memphremagog, in the eastern townships of Quebec, after a petition was signed by 6,000 environmentalists, local municipalities and residents. A Memphremagog area reeve called the scheme "a completely disastrous project".

Big Rideau Lake Association Chairman Douglas Kirkland says the present users of the Rideau Canal would be happy to share it, but only if the environment is protected. This means proceeding carefully, introducing houseboats in small numbers, after proper studies. "The Three Bouys approach of massive centralized marine resorts is totally inappropriate to the aesthetic and ecological environment of the Rideau", Kirkland says.

Big Rideau Lake Association wants a moratorium on any further commercial development until a proper, up-to-date, comprehensive long-range plan for the Rideau is done.


As a result of widespread negative public reaction to the Three Bouys approach, authorities have agreed to delay approvals for the Three Bouys Rideau Lake operation pending a public meeting, April 5, 2 p.m. in St. Paul's United Church auditorium in Perth. For further information, contact Douglas Kirkland in Ottawa at 729-1355 or Bob Sneyd 267-5757 in Perth or 283-0288 in Smiths Falls.

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