

WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

PIEDMONT PUBLISHING
COMPANY, INC.

DONALD J. CHIPMAN
President and General Manager

WALLACE CARROLL
Editor and Publisher

J. PATRICK KELLY
Executive News Editor

JOHN E. ESLINGER
Editorial Page Editor

WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA, TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 1971

Killing a River

IN HIS 1963 history of Ashe County, Arthur L. Fletcher described the New River as "a stream of rare beauty, eye catching and soul satisfying in its loveliness."

The author will get no argument from the thousands of tourists, fishermen and native mountain folk who have had the pleasure of roaming its banks. The calmness of the New is the calmness of the mountains themselves. Its limpid depths sparkling with sand and white pebbles, the river takes its way through lush bottomlands thick with grain and past high mountains which, at intervals, rise straight up from the water's edge. The New is "born," as they say, at a point just south of the Virginia line, beneath a rockribbed precipice which guards the two forks of the river like an old man sunning himself in the August afternoon. From there it flows through six southwestern Virginia counties and on into West Virginia where it merges with the Gauley to become part of the great Kanawha system.

Despite its name the New is North Carolina's oldest river and one of the oldest in America. It is also the only sizable river in the state to flow north and is notable, most of all, as a fine fishing and boating system — perhaps the finest anywhere in this part of the country.

Yet if the Department of Interior has its way, the New will soon lose this claim to distinction. The department wants to hogtie this marvelous stream and put it at the service of the polluted Kanawha.

The proposed project, now so controversial, had a relatively routine beginning. Nine years ago Ap-

palachian Power Company sought permission to build two hydroelectric dams on the New (for power generating purposes only); but before it could win approval for the project Interior officials urged that no license be granted unless the company agree to store some 25 to 30 times as much water as originally proposed — this for the purpose of flushing pollution out of the Kanawha River way to the north.

Practically every expert not in the hire of Interior or the power company agrees that so massive a project will have a killing effect on the river. From their testimony it appears that the water will be much too unstable for the spawning of bass or sunfish, alternately too hot and too cold to provide a home for trout and too turbulent for boating and canoeing. Furthermore, the periodic drawdowns required for pollution control will produce a sickening tableau of mud-flats, suckholes and weed-choked bottoms swarming with rats and mosquitoes.

All this in the dubious hope that the Interior Department's harebrained "pollution dilution" theory will somehow pan out. There was a time when environmentalists in and out of government believed in the concept, but many of them have now retreated from that view.

It seems to us that the time has come for the men at Interior also to beat a hasty retreat. They need not feel embarrassed at confessing their error: Stewart Udall, an ex-Secretary of the Interior and a former advocate of the water-storage project, has long since denounced it as unworkable and downright silly.