

Fate of Canadian Rivers to Be Decided By Parliamentarians

OTTAWA — A last-minute meeting of the Finance and Transport Committees will take place on Monday to reconsider a controversial aspect of the federal *Budget Implementation Act* that would threaten the protection of Canadian waterways.

“Environmental and outdoor recreation groups oppose the inclusion of amendments to the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) in the budget bill,” stated Celeste Côté, National Water Campaigner for Sierra Club Canada. “These amendments will impact both recreational access to and environmental protection of Canada’s waterways. This is a serious matter, and should not be considered as part of a politically sensitive budget vote.”

“The right of navigation belongs to all Canadians and the federal government has exclusive constitutional jurisdiction to protect this right. These amendments are not budgetary in nature and should be considered separately with more adequate stakeholder consultation,” explains Will Amos, staff lawyer with Ecojustice Canada. “When I represent paddlers and environmentalists before the Standing Committees, my goal will be to convince Parliamentarians that these amendments are ill-conceived.”

The proposed changes jeopardize access to waterways and reduce environmental protection by granting discretion to the Transport Minister to bypass the approval process for potentially harmful projects. The legitimacy of the amendments has also been criticized due to the inadequate consultation of affected stakeholders, such as outdoor recreation, outfitter and ecotourism groups, First Nations, angler and hunter groups, and environmental organizations.

“The NWPA and navigation rights are integral part of Canada’s environmental protection regime. If you take away the protection of navigation rights, you will impact the natural environment on Canadian waterways,” said Mark Mattson, President and Waterkeeper of Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, which will present at Monday’s joint committee meeting. “This is not a wise thing to do, even in tough economic times.”

Mountain Equipment Co-op CEO David Labistour said, “More than one million MEC members canoe and kayak on Canada’s waterways. We believe the proposed amendments to the NWPA will significantly erode outdoor recreation in this country, and the opportunities it provides for adventure and inspiration. We join with others in calling for the removal of the NWPA amendments from the Budget Implementation Act.”

The Canadian Rivers Network is a collaboration of many regional, provincial and national organizations across Canada including Sierra Club Canada, Ecojustice Canada, David Suzuki Foundation, Paddle Canada, members of Waterkeepers Canada, Fondation Rivières, Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia, Newfoundland Paddling Association, and the Ontario Recreational Canoe and Kayak Association.

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CANADIAN RIVERS NETWORK

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