

# Dam Nonsense in Kentucky

The Army Corps of Engineers is about to commit another offense against the nation's rapidly vanishing wilderness and beauty. The corps proposes to begin construction in March of a dam that would inundate the gorge of the Red River in Kentucky.

The Red River, which runs through the Daniel Boone National Forest, is rich in history, in fish and animals, and in magnificent scenery. Its rapids and "white water" make it one of the few remaining wild rivers in the eastern United States. Its gorge is lined with massive, towering cliffs and spanned by more than thirty natural stone bridges.

The dam proposal, which has been floating unnoticed in bureaucratic backwaters for thirteen years, would mean at best a questionable intrusion. But as so often happens with Army Engineer proposals, this plan does not even make sense in its own terms. It started out as a flood-control project. But the dam would reduce the cresting of the Ohio River in a major flood by only two-tenths of a foot.

Of late, the argument for a dam has shifted to the need for impounding water for Lexington and other cities downstream. But these cities can impound much closer and less scenic streams. Moreover, the reservoir would be adequate to meet their needs only for the next thirty years. The dam itself would be useless because of siltation in about a century. Geologists point out that a man-made lake in the Red River Valley is a harebrained idea. The whole region rests on porous limestone.

As usual, the recreational advantages of the artificial lake are being stressed, but the lake will be an eyesore—as are so many such lakes—in the summer when it is drawn down and its shores are laid bare. Recreationally speaking, the dam would merely substitute the pleasures of those who like motorboat racing for the pleasures of those who like hiking, fishing and canoeing in an unspoiled valley.

Senator John Sherman Cooper, Kentucky Republican, says that once Congress has authorized a project, "it has been the policy of the Congress to proceed with the project." With a budget squeeze on, Senator Cooper, as ranking minority member of the Senate Public Works Committee and of the Appropriations subcommittee on public works, would have no difficulty next session in persuading his colleagues to repeal the authorization. It is time for Senator Cooper to stop pussyfooting and get to work to save a beautiful river that belongs not only to his state but to all the nation.