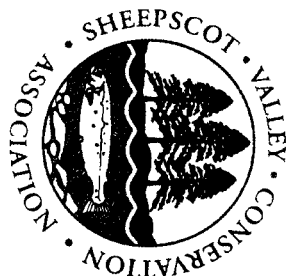


Wiscasset Bypass and the SVCA



Newsletter of the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association

Summer 2010

Sheepscot Log

Although a highway bypass around the town of Wiscasset has been under study and discussion for a half century, the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association has never been a strong proponent. Fifteen years ago, when the latest chapter in the bypass wars began, SVCA's position was that the periodic summer traffic backups did not warrant the environmental damage that construction and use of a bypass would produce.

Throughout the 90's we supported a no-build option. But when the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) began laying out alternative routes, and political pressure for a bypass mounted, we undertook a careful analysis of the potential environmental impacts of each route based on a number of indicators including wetland loss, landscape fragmentation, effects on threatened and endangered species as well as the number of residences and businesses that would need to relocate. The results of this analysis indicated that of all the proposed routes, N8c would be the least damaging, despite its requiring a new long bridge over the Sheepscot, and would also be the most effective route in terms of reducing summertime traffic congestion. Therefore, while still favoring no-build, the seeming unlikelihood of its acceptance by the MDOT road planners led SVCA to lend reluctant support to N8c as the next best alternative.

Although the MDOT preferred a different bypass route, the Army Corps of Engineers, the designated decisionmakers under the controlling federal environmental legislation, recently determined that N8c is indeed the route that would be least environmentally destructive. While this decision is a significant step in the process, budgetary constraints, environmental impact study requirements and estimates that the project price tag could reach \$100 million have led many to speculate that it will be decades before the bypass is built, or that it may never be built at all. Even in the best of circumstances it will be over a decade before completion of construction, which only strengthens the case for prompt implementation of further summertime traffic mitigation measures in Wiscasset, including better management of pedestrian flows.

(\$105 tax-deductible)

in the mail.