

It is this last project, Big Walnut, which has been the center of some criticism from a small number of conservationists whose interest in the area came to light only after the Corps of Engineers designated the area in Putnam County, north of Greencastle, Ind., as the most feasible site for construction of the much needed reservoir.

I want to emphasize here this morning that there is overwhelming support for this project from the people of Putnam County who recognize, as does the Corps of Engineers and State governmental officials from the Governor's office on down, the tremendous value of locating such a reservoir in this area.

Among the many endorsements of the Big Walnut Reservoir have been official resolutions from the State of Indiana, the Wabash Valley Association, represented here today by its executive secretary, Howard Mendenhall, and the Wabash Interstate Commission, represented by another good friend of ours, Dr. B. K. Barton, as well as hundreds of residents who attended the 1965 public hearing.

As you are well aware, the Department of Interior initially withheld its recommendation of the construction of Big Walnut because of the desire to preserve the natural and historic values of the site. And this position is the basis of the Corps of Engineers report before you which includes Big Walnut but does not take a position in regard to authorization of the project at this time.

Those of us sincerely concerned about the need for the project have been in constant communication with the Corps of Engineers, the Department of Interior, the National Park Service, as well as the Wabash Interstate Commission and the Wabash Valley Association, in an attempt to arrive at some compromise which would permit us to proceed with construction and at the same time preserve the ecological features in Big Walnut Valley.

I am happy to point out to this committee that in the last week a significant and encouraging breakthrough in these negotiations has been made. Since the time the Secretary of the Army forwarded his report to the Bureau of the Budget and on to Congress, the Department of Interior has indicated its willingness to reconsider its decision to withhold recommendation of the Big Walnut project.

In fact, and I am certain this will be corroborated by my good friends from the Corps of Engineers, representatives from the different agencies walked the area in question only last week to determine the exact value of the site.

It is regrettable this important inspection by all parties involved was not arranged before a final report was forwarded to Congress. But the encouraging fact is that such an investigation has been made and Interior now has indicated to me and to the Corps of Engineers that perhaps there is room here for compromise.

The Secretary of Interior has before him a memorandum from the Park Service which says the compromise suggested by the Corps of Engineers in its supplement to the third interim report would provide a high-quality nature preserve site of value to educators as well as the general public.

Another meeting is scheduled between the Secretary and Gen. Charles Noble of the Corps of Engineers as soon as the Secretary returns to the city.

Interior is reconsidering and all parties involved have expressed confidence a compromise will be agreed to in the very near future.