



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

River Regulators to Explore Early Warnings

PATTY RITCHIE May 26, 2011

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Move to save homes and businesses comes after recent record Flooding In Jefferson County

State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced that regulators who help control the flow of the Black River have agreed to explore joining the New York's instant alert system to give homeowners and businesses early warning in the event of flooding or other emergencies.

Senator Ritchie organized a meeting between officials of the Hudson River-Black River Regulating District and the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services

(DHSES) to address concerns by some Jefferson County residents and businesses who never received any notice of water releases that they suspect contributed to the recent flooding in the southern part of the county.

DHSES officials outlined the benefits of their NY-ALERT system, which issues automated alerts through email, text messages and even phone calls to homes and businesses that enroll in the free program, and told the regulators that such a system could be in place for Jefferson and Lewis County residents who live near the Black River in 30 days.

“The recent flooding in Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties and, even more so, recent weather-related events across the country, remind us all of the importance of early warning and timely, accurate information to protecting lives and property in a disaster,” said Sen. Ritchie.

“Thankfully, we have not had the extent of damage and tragedy facing our neighbors in the South and Midwest, but all of these events show the value of being prepared, and staying informed,” Sen. Ritchie said.

Sen. Ritchie contacted regulating district officials after visiting flood-impacted homes and businesses near Carthage, in Jefferson County. At the time, when the Black River had reached levels not seen in nearly 50 years, the district acknowledged performing water releases from its Stillwater Reservoir, but did not give any notice to downriver property owners of the releases.

The regulating district says that the releases were small, and did not affect river levels and said that, while they do not currently notify downriver communities of releases, the information is available on the agency’s website. Sen. Ritchie said that business and homeowners will benefit from another level of warnings about unusually high water levels.

“I want to thank the officials of the Hudson River-Black River Regulating District and the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services for recognizing the importance of advance public notice, and for agreeing to work on a solution that will give the public information that can help protect our communities,” Sen. Ritchie said.

In her meeting with the district and DHSES, officials said they would consider future alerts for reservoir releases, flood warnings issued by weather forecasters and other emergencies.

“It was a productive meeting, and informative as well,” said Michael A. Clark, acting executive director of the HRBRRD. “We look forward to continuing to work with Sen. Ritchie, DHSES and NY-ALERT to provide a component of river data to people and businesses along the Black River.”

More than 6 million New Yorkers have signed onto NY-ALERT, which was launched in 2007 and distributes messages related to a broad range of conditions and emergencies, from school closing to traffic jams, weather advisories and emergencies involving nuclear plants.

Sen. Ritchie has created a link on her website—www.ritchie.nysenate.gov—to sign up for NY-ALERT, and she is encouraging citizens to take advantage of the free service.

More information is also available at www.nyalert.gov.