

Suit filed to protect Atlantic salmon

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By *The Associated Press wire report* May 13, 2008 09:51 AM

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Conservationists are going to court to protect the dwindling population of Atlantic salmon on Maine's Kennebec River.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is among the plaintiffs who filed suit Monday in Portland against federal agencies that regulate fisheries. At issue is what conservationists say is the government's failure to act on their petition to protect Kennebec River salmon under the Endangered Species Act.

Ed Friedman, who chairs Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, says that even as the salmon are on the verge of extinction, the agencies continue to stall. He says salmon runs on the Kennebec were once the stuff of legend, but today only a few fish make it up the river.

Suit calls for Kennebec salmon protection

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By *John Richardson Portland Press Herald Staff Reporter* May 13, 2008 02:31 PM

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Two conservation organizations and a river activist have sued federal agencies demanding Endangered Species Act protection for Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec River.

The Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, and Douglas Watts filed the suit Monday in Portland against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Division.

The plaintiffs say the once legendary salmon runs on the Kennebec are on the verge of disappearing and the federal agencies have failed to step in. The federal government declared salmon in several Maine rivers to be formally protected under the act in 2000, but did not include salmon in the Kennebec and other large rivers in central and southern Maine.

Kennebec Salmon Focus of Federal Suit

Posted on: Tuesday, 13 May 2008, 15:00 CDT

By KEVIN MILLER; OF THE NEWS STAFF

Two conservation organizations and a Maine resident have filed suit to force the federal government to strengthen protections for Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec River.

If successful, the suit could have implications for populations of sea-run salmon in the Penobscot River as well.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, the Vermont-based Center for Biological Diversity and Augusta resident Douglas Watts want federal agencies to take action on a 2005 petition calling for the Kennebec's salmon population to be listed as an endangered species.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are reviewing whether to protect salmon populations in the Kennebec, Penobscot and Androscoggin rivers under the Endangered Species Act. Salmon populations in eight smaller rivers or streams already are listed as endangered species.

But the groups filed suit in U.S. District Court in Maine on Monday alleging that the agencies are moving too slowly on the Kennebec petition.

Watts said in an interview that he only had time to prepare a detailed report for the Kennebec when he wrote the original petition in 2005, which is the precursor to the current lawsuit. But he hopes the lawsuit will force the federal government's hand on the Penobscot as well.

"If they make a decision on the Kennebec, they are going to have to make a decision on the Penobscot at the same time," Watts said.

Once abundant in New England rivers, Atlantic salmon are now virtually extinct throughout their former range in the United States. Only the Penobscot boasts a sizable annual run of spawning salmon, and the vast majority of those fish can be traced to two federal salmon hatcheries in Maine.

Just 16 salmon were counted returning to spawn on the Kennebec last year. The return on the Penobscot, by comparison, was more than 900.

Representatives from the federal agencies could not be reached for comment late Monday.

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