



Lawsuits aim to protect endangered Atlantic salmon

Maine is home to the last wild Atlantic salmon in the United States—but dams along their critical migration routes pose a severe threat to the fish. Early this year, we joined Friends of Merrymeeting Bay in taking legal action to protect the last wild Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers.

Dams pose “direct and significant threat”

The Androscoggin and Kennebec Rivers provide key spawning habitat and migration routes for the endangered Atlantic salmon, but unprotected turbines at dams along the rivers are killing the fish and pushing the Atlantic salmon toward extinction.

The Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers once teemed with salmon runs of 100,000 or more, but now almost no Atlantic salmon return to the rivers. In 2010, only five adult salmon returned to the Kennebec, and 10 returned to the Androscoggin.

Our lawsuits, filed in U.S. District Court in Portland and Bangor, charge multiple dam owners and operators on the rivers for violating the federal Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act. The salmon populations in both rivers are on the Endangered Species List.

The National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have found that dams “are among the leading causes of both historical declines and contemporary low abundance” of Kennebec and Androscoggin salmon, and that “dams remain a direct and significant threat to Atlantic salmon.”

The biggest problem is that the dams kill and injure migrating salmon when they attempt to pass through the dams’ rotating turbine blades—akin to having fish swim through the rotating blades of a giant window fan.

Unfortunately, the dam owners have refused to implement simple protection

measures—such as installing effective devices to divert salmon from turbines—that have been adopted elsewhere.

Simple steps could aid salmon recovery

When we announced the lawsuits in early February, Environment Maine Director Emily Figdor explained to the media, “We’re in a situation where there’s little time left; these dams are pushing an iconic Maine fish to the brink of extinction.”

Ed Friedman, chair of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and our partner in the litigation, added that, “Unless dam owners stop stalling on basic salmon protection measures, the clock will strike midnight for the remaining Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers.”

While the situation is indeed dire, 40 years ago there were no bald eagles in the same part of Maine, whereas now there are hundreds. Atlantic salmon recovery can begin—but only once the dam owners take sensible actions to prevent salmon from swimming into spinning turbine blades.



take action



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www.EnvironmentMaine.org/news



Questions for Rep. Jeff McCabe

1. How big of a threat do you think Gov. Paul LePage’s proposals to open Maine’s North Woods to development pose?

Gov. LePage’s proposals threaten some of Maine’s most special and pristine places—the very places many of us go to hike, fish and camp and are at the heart of our natural heritage. I’m optimistic, however, that the Legislature will not rubber stamp the governor’s proposals if lawmakers hear loud and strong from their constituents about the need to protect Maine’s last remaining wild places.

2. What could these proposals mean for the North Woods?

The North Woods are like no other place in the East. It’s the largest remaining undeveloped forest east of the Rocky Mountains. But Gov. LePage’s proposals could open the North Woods to mega resorts, large subdivisions, casinos, big box stores, and more. The consequences could be dire, and we can’t let it happen.

3. What are the most important things that Mainers concerned about these proposals can do?

Please contact your state representatives and senators to ask them to protect the North Woods. Tell your friends and family about what’s at stake and get them involved too. Finally, consider writing a letter to the editor of your local paper.

▲ Jeff McCabe is a state representative from Skowhegan and serves on the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, which will consider Gov. LePage’s North Woods proposals. He also manages Lake George Regional Park in Skowhegan and Canaan.