

Environmentalists ask judge to shut down turbines for salmon



Staff Report

[Maine](#) |

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LEWISTON — Two Maine environmental groups are asking a federal judge to temporarily shut down hydroelectric turbines at four dams on the Androscoggin and Kennebec rivers.

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Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, said Tuesday his organization and Environment Maine filed a motion last week in federal court asking for a preliminary injunction against the dams' operators, NextEra Energy Resources, FPL Energy Maine Hydro and affiliated companies.

A spokesman for NextEra said Tuesday the hydroelectric turbines at those dams had been sold to Brookfield Power.

Friedman said the injunction, if approved, would also pertain to Brookfield.

Attempts to reach Brookfield for comment were unsuccessful Tuesday.

In a prepared statement issued Tuesday, the environmental groups said shutting down the turbines, temporarily would, "save thousands of out-migrating young Atlantic salmon."

"Without a shutdown, the endangered salmon smolts will be forced through rapidly spinning turbine blades at each dam, where a high percentage will be killed in violation of the Endangered Species Act," the statement read.

The dams involved include three on the Kennebec River and one at Brunswick on the Androscoggin River.

"It's been nearly four years since Atlantic salmon were listed as endangered, and NextEra still has failed to take action to save these iconic fish," said Emily Figdor, director of Environment Maine.

Friedman said the dam owners and the government agencies in Maine were stalling on protecting the fish.

"This is a situation in which a federal judge — and only a federal judge — can take immediate action to help save this species," Friedman said. "The court needs to step in before it's too late."

Friedman said biologists studying salmon on the river believe this year could be an important one for the federal endangered fish noting as estimated 20,000 young salmon are expected to migrate down the Kennebec while another 1,000 will migrate down the Androscoggin.

Federal law prohibits the "taking" of endangered species without a federal permit.

The law defines taking as, "killing, wounding, or interfering with breeding patterns."

The injunction asks the turbines to be idled for seven weeks. Friedman said the electricity from the turbines amounts to only .1 percent of the total power on the New England grid.

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