Thousands of alewives killed after going through turbine at Brookfield Dam

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by Brad Rogers,WGME

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For 200 years, dams along Maine’s rivers have had major impacts on fish, like Atlantic salmon

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BRUNSWICK (WGME) – For 200 years, dams along Maine’s rivers have had major impacts on fish, like Atlantic salmon and herring, that are native to Maine.

Now, conservationists are saying there was a large fish kill involving alewives, a type of herring, last weekend in Brunswick.

Conservationists estimate thousands of alewives were killed on Saturday when the fish went through an electricity-producing turbine that had been turned back on at the Brookfield Dam upstream in Brunswick.

"I counted about 30 fish per yard, so that's 3,000 fish right there in this little stretch," Free the Andro Founder Chip Spies said.

Free the Andro is a conservation group trying to protect fish on the Androscoggin River from the dams they encounter.

“The Gulf of Maine as a whole is impacted when migratory fish populations can't move," Spies said.

Brookfield, which owns and operates the dam, says it was informed Friday morning that crews were going to lower Sabattus Lake for the season.





For 200 years, dams along Maine's rivers have had major impacts on fish, like Atlantic salmon and herring, that are native to Maine. (WGME)

They initiated a nighttime shutdown to allow safe passage for alewives swimming to the Gulf of Maine.

But Brookfield says a single turbine went back on for four hours Saturday, causing a widespread fish kill.

"What it shows is not only do the fishways not work, but the protocols don't work," Spies said.

CBS13 reached out to Brookfield, but we have no answer yet as to why a turbine was turned back on knowing alewives were headed downstream.

"Maybe they got a little confused about when the fish migrate. Eels migrate at night, pretty much exclusively," Friends of Merrymeeting Bay Chair Ed Friedman said.

A spokesman for the company said, "After project personnel observed fish mortality downstream Saturday morning, they shut down generation completely, and it is still offline to support the estimated 1 million migrating herring."

For 200 years, dams along Maine's rivers have had major impacts on fish, like Atlantic salmon and herring, that are native to Maine. (WGME)

"The water is going through there to create the electricity. And the fish get sucked through there as well," Friedman said. "I'd like to see the dam come down."

Spies wants to first see what Brookfield can do to better protect fish.

"We're seeking not only improved fish passage, but protocols with the dam operator that actually work to protect the fish," Spies said.

Brookfield says that's its goal as well.

"They're putting out alternative designs for both downstream and upstream fishways now," Spies said. "And what we want to see is designs that we know that the science backs up that say will work."

in 2029. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will determine whether to renew the license and what, if any, new conditions may come with that.