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Thousands of alewives died after passing through the turbine at Brookfield Dam

Maine

By **Lynn Sommers** Last updated **Oct 13, 2026**



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

Now conservationists say there was a major fish kill involving alewives, a type of herring, in Brunswick last weekend.

Conservationists estimate that thousands of alewives were killed Saturday when the fish flew through a power-generating turbine that had been turned back on at Brookfield Dam upriver in Brunswick.

"I counted about 30 fish per meter, so that's 3,000 fish in this small section," said Chip Spies, founder of Free the Andro.

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

“The Gulf of Maine as a whole is impacted when migratory fish populations are unable to move,” Spies said.

Brookfield, which owns and operates the dam, said it was informed Friday morning that crews would be lowering Sabattus Lake for the season.

For 200 years, dams along Maine’s rivers have had a major impact on Maine’s native fish such as Atlantic salmon and herring. (WGME)

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

However, Brookfield says a single turbine was operational again for four hours on Saturday, resulting in a widespread fish kill.

“It shows that not only are the fish passes not working, but also the protocols,” said Spies.

CBS13 reached out to Brookfield, but we don’t yet have an answer as to why a turbine was turned back on when they knew alewives were heading downstream.

“Maybe they were a little confused about when the fish migrate. Eels migrate almost exclusively at night,” said Ed Friedman, chairman of the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.

A spokesman for the company said: “After project staff observed a fish kill downstream on Saturday morning, they switched off power generation completely and it is still offline to supply the estimated 1 million migratory herring.”



For 200 years, dams along Maine’s rivers have had a major impact on Maine’s native fish such as Atlantic salmon and herring. (WGME)

“The water flows through there to generate electricity. And the fish are sucked in there too,” Friedman said. “I’d like to see the dam fall.”

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

“We’re not only looking for improved fish passage, but also protocols with the dam operator that actually help protect the fish,” Spies said.

Brookfield says that’s his goal too.

“They are currently developing alternative designs for both downstream and upstream fishing routes,” Spies said. “And what we want to see are designs that we know are scientifically proven and work.”

Brookfield’s license for this dam expires in 2029. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will decide whether to renew the license and what new conditions, if any, will be associated with it.

Lynn Sommers 25399 posts 0 comments

Lynn Sommers covers the six New England states with a focus on regional economics, healthcare policy, and the political traditions that make the Northeast a distinct force in American governance. A career journalist based in the Boston metro, Lynn brings institutional knowledge of New England's legislative landscape and community dynamics.