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The Times Record

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NEWS

U.S. judge: Dam suits ought not be blocked

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Published:

Tuesday, July 19, 2011 2:06 PM EDT

TOPSHAM — A federal magistrate recommends that two lawsuits against dam owners on the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers be allowed to move forward.

Environmental advocacy groups Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and Environment Maine filed four complaints last winter seeking to compel the owners and operators of seven dams to take action to protect dwindling populations of endangered Atlantic salmon.

U.S. Magistrate Judge John Rich last week recommended that motions by Miller Hydro Group and Topsham Hydro Partners — seeking to have the lawsuits dismissed — be denied. Federal Judge George Singal will make the final determination, according to The Associated Press.

“Now that we’ve been given the green light, we will seek to use the power of the federal courts to push the dam owners to do the right thing and bring the iconic Atlantic salmon back from the brink of extinction,” said Emily Figdor, director of Environment Maine, in a statement issued late Sunday night.

Miller Hydro owns and operates the Worumbo dam in Lisbon Falls and Topsham Hydro owns and operates the Pejepscot dam in Topsham. The companies have 14 days to file any objections to Judge Rich’s recommended decision.

Atlantic salmon were declared endangered in the two rivers in 2009. The two groups want dam owners to take measures to protect the fish from being killed by the dams’ spinning turbines.

“The long-term viability of Maine’s economy is directly proportional to environmental conditions,” said Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, in a statement. “The judge’s recommendation to move forward on our suit is a positive step for both Maine’s economic and environmental health.”

Miller Hydro Group officials have called Worumbo a “fish friendly facility” and noted that the company was the first in Maine to be certified as a Low Impact Hydropower Institute.

Information from The Associated Press is included in this report.

news@timesrecord.com

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