

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

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For Immediate Release

Residents Sue Kennebec Dam Owners to Protect Salmon & Shad

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Augusta, ME -- On Tuesday, July 13, 2010, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB), Ed Friedman of Bowdoinham and Douglas Watts of Augusta filed a Notice of Intent to sue under the U.S. Clean Water Act, owners of four Kennebec River hydro-electric dams. These dams indiscriminately kill endangered Atlantic salmon and protected American shad as they pass through turbine blades of dams in Waterville, Fairfield and Skowhegan.

In June 2009, Kennebec River Atlantic salmon were declared an endangered species by the U.S. government under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Until it was dammed in the early 19th century, the Kennebec River had a population of 100,000 Atlantic salmon. In sharp contrast, only four Atlantic salmon have been trapped this year at Lockwood, the downstream-most dam on the river, in Waterville.

"We are watching the final extinction of Kennebec River Atlantic salmon," said Douglas Watts, founder of Friends of the Kennebec Salmon in Augusta.

Under the U.S. Clean Water Act, following 60 days written notice, citizens may sue dam owners in federal court if they are violating federal and state dam licenses.

In their Notice of Intent to Sue, filed July 13, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, Friedman and Watts assert Kennebec River dam owners are in violation of state and federal requirements which state Atlantic salmon and American shad must not be allowed to enter the turbines of the four dams, where they will be killed.

Because dams impede upward migration of salmon the state of Maine traps the fish which are then transported upstream to spawn in the Sandy River. After spawning, following eons of genetic programming, these few surviving fish are left to run a gauntlet of four dams with unprotected turbines as they attempt to return to the ocean. Shad have recently been transported two dams upriver and will face the same fate.

“This is insane”, said Ed Friedman who also chairs Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, “we are seeing the only remaining reproducing salmon left in the Kennebec forced into a high stakes reverse game of Russian Roulette where there is only one empty chamber or sluiceway through a dam and multiple chambers loaded with unscreened turbines.”

The federal lawsuit by FOMB, Watts and Friedman asks a federal judge to require NextEra (formerly Florida Power & Light Energy(FPLE), Myllykoski North America and Madison Paper Industries, the owners of the four lowermost dams on the Kennebec River, to immediately install protective screening over their turbine intakes to prevent Atlantic salmon and American shad from being killed in the turbines as they migrate downstream to the Atlantic Ocean.

"The turbine screening we are asking NextEra and the other dam owners to install, costs about what these corporations earn in one hour, said Watts and surely less than they pay in legal fees to keep from having to protect these species."

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