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## Group files notice of intent to sue Kennebec River dam owners

Claim turbine blades kill endangered Atlantic salmon

By John Hale

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Augusta — Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and two citizens on Tuesday, July 13, filed a notice of intent to sue under the U.S. Clean Water Act the owners of four hydroelectric dams on the Kennebec River.

The Friends and Douglas Watts of Augusta and Ed Friedman of Bowdoinham claim the dams' unprotected turbine blades are indiscriminately killing endangered Atlantic salmon and protected American shad on their downstream migrations.

Two dams are located in Waterville, one in Fairfield and one in Skowhegan. The claimants want the dam owners to erect protective screens over the turbine intakes so the fish will be pushed aside into safe bypass sluiceways.

In June last year, Kennebec River Atlantic salmon were declared an endangered species by the U.S. government under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. According to the claimants, until the river was dammed in the early 19th century, it had a population of 100,000 Atlantic salmon.

“This year, there were only four salmon trapped in Waterville,” said Watts. “That scares the heck out of me. Last year, there were 24. You can't get much lower than four. You need two males and two females to reproduce.”

The state traps the salmon below the Lockwood Dam in Waterville and transports them upstream to the Sandy River where they spawn. Then the adult salmon are on their own to navigate downstream through the four dams.

NextEra Energy Resources, formerly Florida Power and Light, owns the Weston Dam in Skowhegan, the Shawmut Dam in Fairfield and the Lockwood Dam in Waterville. Madison Paper Industries owns the Hydro Kennebec Dam in Waterville.

A spokeswoman for E. Russel Drechsel, president and CEO of Madison Paper Industries, said Thursday, July 15, that Drechsel would have no comment on the notice of intent to sue his company.

“I have no idea if these folks are going to be willing to talk or if they're going to say, ‘We'll see you in court,’” said Watts. “I would prefer to see that we come to some kind of agreement. We're required to give them 60 days' notice to create an opportunity for the parties to come up with a solution that doesn't involve litigation.”

Watts said putting protective screening in the water over the turbine intakes is economically feasible for the

companies and has been done successfully by several dam owners in Maine.

“These dams generate millions of dollars a year in electricity,” said Watts. “Most of the water goes through the turbines. That’s the whole purpose of the dams, to make power.”

Watts is founder of Friends of the Kennebec Salmon in Augusta. Friedman is chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.