

Environmental group sues Maine DEP over Androscoggin River water quality classification

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay said the state is failing to upgrade the river's classification from C to B, despite evidence it meets cleaner standards.

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RICHMOND, Maine — For Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, rivers are more than just waterways, they're lifelines.

"We want to have healthy circulation systems... unobstructed arteries and veins," said Friedman

He compares rivers to the human body, emphasizing the need to keep them clean and flowing freely. "Everyone profits from a clean river," he added, calling water quality a critical part of overall quality of life.

That belief is now at the center of a lawsuit filed by the environmental group against the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

At issue is a stretch of the Androscoggin River between Worumbo Dam and Gulf Island Pond Dam.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay said water quality testing shows this section meets the standards for a Class B designation, which indicates cleaner water. It is currently classified as Class C, a lower standard.

Rachel Doughty, an attorney representing Friends of Merrymeeting Bay told NEWS CENTER Maine the federal Clean Water Act includes a policy that requires states to upgrade waterways when they meet higher standards.

She described it as a system designed to continuously improve water quality.

“It’s a ratchet that’s ever moving waters into cleaner status and preventing them from backsliding,” Doughty said.

According to the lawsuit, Maine is not following that requirement.

Doughty said the state is basing classifications on how much pollution could enter the river and not on the river’s current condition.

That approach, she said, makes it nearly impossible for waterways to qualify for upgrades.

“There’s a prioritization here of a right to pollute over a right to clean water,” Doughty said.

Friedman says the group is turning to the courts to enforce what they see as a clear legal obligation.

“It’s the law, and we need to be enforcing these important laws,” he said.