

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

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Group Calls for Upgrade to Muskie's Androscoggin River

11 years of data support reclassification of lower river from C to B

RICHMOND, MAINE: Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) today released its 2010 Androscoggin River monitoring and analysis report supporting a multi-year effort to upgrade the lower river from Merrymeeting Bay to Worumbo dam in Lisbon Falls.

With data from some sampling sites going back 11 years, ambient river conditions have consistently met those of a higher quality than it is now classified at. "The beautiful Androscoggin, once Clean Water Act poster child and still considered poor step child of Maine's large rivers is getting cleaner and deserves recognition" said Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.

Both the Clean Water Act and state statute (Title 38 §464 (4) F (4) dictate when the actual quality of any classified water exceeds the minimum standards of the next highest classification, that higher water quality must be maintained and protected. In Maine, the Board of Environmental Protection shall recommend to the Legislature that that water be reclassified in the next higher classification.

FOMB volunteer monitors rigorously trained under EPA and DEP standards have been monitoring the river even more intensively in 2009 and 2010 under the full spectrum of conditions-high to low flows and hot to cool temperatures. The primary factors determining classification are dissolved oxygen (DO) and *E. coli* bacteria. In the nearly 300 measurements FOMB made in the last couple of years *E. coli* has always met the Class B standard within the proposed upgrade area while there have been three times when DO readings have come up just shy of the 7mg/l threshold for Class B. Those readings 6.9, 6.6 and 6.5, were all taken early in the morning when DO is at its lowest point in the 24 hour cycle.

Volunteer monitor Kathleen McGee notes the three outlier measurements are relatively insignificant and shouldn't drive state policy. "These three points, well within the margin of

error, are anomalies, and are not representative of actual Class B river conditions met more than 99% of the time” she said, adding that in at least five years of business as usual for mills and wastewater plants along the river, Class B conditions continue to be met.

Ironically, the only party routinely speaking out against the upgrade is the DEP who continues to cite a relicensing statute [§464 (4) D] instead of the controlling classification statute.

“If you always had to wait for relicensing standards to be met before upgrading, an upgrade would be impossible to achieve. Without a goal-driven process as intended by law, there is no way to ratchet water quality up to the standards we were to have met in 1983”, McGee said.

A large reason for the upgrade is anti-degradation language in federal and state law which prohibits backsliding of water quality without significant study. “Communities and citizens want the upgrade” said Friedman, “90% of Maine jobs are created by small businesses. We are finally realizing a clean river is an artery not only for fish and the other critical life in it, but for the economy along side it. In these hard times more than any, we can’t afford not to upgrade.”

LD 154 introduced by Senator Seth Goodall of Richmond to upgrade the lower Androscoggin will be heard February 8 at 1pm after a briefing on the subject at noon. The full FOMB report may be found on their website at www.friendsofmerrymeetingbay.org . It is linked from their homepage.

[Water Quality Data Analysis and Review, Lower Androscoggin River](#) (pdf file 2.5 MB)