

Androscoggin River upgrade delayed for at least a year

Rep. Ralph Tucker, a Brunswick Democrat, called it “a great idea” to put off consideration of the proposal in part because he would like to see upstream towns and industries included in the discussion about what ought to be done.



By [Steve Collins](#) Sun Journal

Share

1 Comment



View of farms and woodlands of the Androscoggin River Valley from Glassface Ledges Trail in Rumford. *Photo Mahaosuc Land Trust*

Lawmakers sent a [bill to upgrade the water quality classification of the Androscoggin River](#) downstream Wednesday when a committee agreed to postpone action on the measure until next year.

The Environment and Natural Resources Committee unanimously opted to carry over the bill in order to give time for regulators to renew several wastewater treatment plant permits and press ahead with a bureaucratic review of the river's water.

Rep. Ralph Tucker, a Brunswick Democrat, called it "a great idea" to put off consideration of the proposal in part because he would like to see upstream towns and industries included in the discussion about what ought to be done.

Tucker said the delay offers "a chance to come together" and examine in more depth the benefits and costs of upgrading the regulatory status of the river to Class B from the Gulf Island Dam in Lewiston to Merrymeeting Bay.

Related

[Upgrading the Androscoggin River under a new bill sparks debate](#)

The change, pushed by environmentalists, would provide a tougher standard for water quality protection along a stretch of river that almost always already meets the Class B standards.

Critics questioned whether pushing through the upgrade might hinder the operations of paper mills upstream in Jay, Rumford and Gorham, New Hampshire. They also questioned the wisdom of putting a change through before treatment plant permits for Lewiston/Auburn, Lisbon and Brunswick are renewed for another five years.

Waiting until 2022, legislators said, will give the state Department of Environmental Protection time to finish the permitting process and plunge forward with its triennial review of the Androscoggin's status to determine if it thinks the river ought to be upgraded.

With so much up in the air, state Sen. Richard Bennett, an Oxford Republican, said it is "very premature" to take action now.

Bennett hailed progress in cleaning up a river that he called "unbelievably poisonous" during his youth.

Related

[Clean Water Act has transformed Androscoggin River](#)

"Thank God we've made the progress we've made," he said, before adding that it is best "not to jump the gun legislatively" until the existing efforts to examine the Androscoggin have a chance for completion.

Rep. Jeff Hanley, a Pittston Republican, said he only reluctantly agreed to carry over the bill because he can't see a reason to circumvent the process already in place to review river classifications.

Rep. Vicki Doudera, a Camden Democrat, said she hopes the delay will give its backers time to bring other towns on board.

Officials from some upstream communities, including Rumford, have expressed worry that changing the water quality standard could stymie their economic development efforts and make it harder for existing companies to operate.

By carrying over the bill to next year, the committee didn't take any stand on its merits. The move merely delays the necessity of voting on it one way or another.

Related Headlines

- [Upgrading the Androscoggin River under a new bill sparks debate, pushback from businesses](#)