

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Groups seek to shut down dam turbines, save Atlantic salmon



Kate Collins | BDN

Maine Department of Marine Resources biologists take scale samples from Atlantic salmon caught in the Veazie Dam trap on June 15, 2009. That same day, the Atlantic salmon of the Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers and their tributaries were added to the federally protected endangered Gulf of Maine population. *Buy Photo*

By [John Holyoke](#), BDN Staff

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BANGOR, Maine — Two citizen conservation groups last week asked a federal judge to order the temporary shutdown of hydroelectric turbines that they say will threaten thousands of endangered Atlantic salmon when those fish try to migrate out of the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers this spring.

According to a press release from the two groups — Environment Maine and Friends of Merrymeeting Bay — the organizations filed a motion on Thursday for a temporary injunction in U.S. District Court in an Endangered Species Act case against defendants NextEra Energy Resources LLC, FPL Energy Maine Hydro LLC, and affiliated companies.

At issue are turbines at the Weston Dam in Skowhegan, Shawmut Dam in Fairfield and Lockwood Dam in Waterville — all on the Kennebec River — and the Brunswick Dam on the Androscoggin River.

“It has been nearly four years since Atlantic salmon were listed [federally] as endangered and NextEra still has failed to take action to save these iconic fish,” Emily Figdor, director of Environment Maine, said in the news release. “Time is running out to save the Atlantic salmon and we simply can’t delay another season.”

In June of 2009, the salmon in the Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers were listed as “endangered” under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The press release cites fisheries biologists that were consulted by the groups who say that this year’s run is uniquely important to salmon recovery efforts.

Due to a rare large return of wild adult salmon in 2011, along with increased state stocking, this year’s run of fish exiting the rivers is expected to be larger than normal — about 20,000 salmon smolts leaving the Kennebec and about 1,000 leaving the Androscoggin.

According to the Maine Department of Marine Resources website, salmon returns were low in both the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers in 2012: Just five adult salmon were counted at the Lockwood Dam on the Kennebec and only one salmon was caught at the Brunswick Dam on the Androscoggin. Records for 2011 were not immediately available.

The press release says NextEra’s own reports and studies have concluded that between one-third and one-half of the Kennebec run would likely be killed trying to pass downriver barriers at Weston, Shawmut and Lockwood, as well as a Hydro Kennebec dam.

According to the release, Jeff Murphy, a National Marine Fisheries Service biologist based in Orono, reviewed a NextEra fish passage study that looked at the three Kennebec River dams. Murphy said he expected extremely low survival of fish trying to get past the three dams, and said his agency recommended “complete turbine shutdowns in the spring and fall ... or installation of state-of-the-art passage facilities.”

Representatives from NextEra, the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the Maine Department of Marine Resources could not be immediately reached for comment Tuesday.

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