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Dams on Kennebec still killing Atlantic salmon

Public documents going back 20 years show that owners of hydroelectric dams on the Kennebec River have been aware that fish are sucked into their turbines and are killed and maimed.

This happens because the intakes of the turbines are open and unscreened, like a window fan with no protective mesh.

In June 2009, the few dozen remaining Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec were declared an endangered species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. It is a federal crime to kill a Kennebec River Atlantic salmon. If you or I did it, we would go to jail.

Kennebec dam owners, however, continue to leave their turbines open and unscreened and allow Atlantic salmon to swim through them, leading to their death.

Because these dam owners have failed to take prompt action to protect the few Atlantic salmon left in the Kennebec, I and Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and Environment Maine are suing them in federal court to stop this killing.

Putting in the turbine screens will cost the dam owners a minuscule fraction of their annual profits. Turbine screening has been done now for a half-decade at the Benton Falls Dam in Benton and the American Tissue Dam in Gardiner with no effect on their ability to generate electricity.

The Kennebec River is owned by all of us, not just out-of-state dam owners. Using a public river for private gain is a privilege, not a right, and with it comes a responsibility to not interfere with our rights to the river and our right to expect that all laws will be obeyed and endangered species will not be harmed or killed or go extinct.

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