

# BANGOR DAILY NEWS

## Parties at odds over Androscoggin River reclassification

By Steve Mistler, Sun Journal  
Posted April 12, 2011, at 11:25 a.m.

AUGUSTA, Maine — A bill designed to upgrade the water quality standard for the lower Androscoggin River appears to be heading toward a compromise.

LD 154 originally set out to reclassify the lower Androscoggin River from C status to B status. Environmental groups say reclassification will ensure that the river keeps moving toward ecological recovery and support regional economic growth.

But the proposal has met stiff opposition from dam owners, paper companies and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. All argue the legislation would create stricter and more costly pollution and permitting standards.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Seth Goodall, D-Richmond, also has encountered push-back from the [Department of Environmental Protection](#) operating under a business-advocacy directive from Gov. [Paul LePage](#). The DEP has said its opposition is based on modeling that showed the river didn't meet Class B standards.

The department's position is disputed by Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, a citizen organization that measured water quality levels in the river for two years. The group rejects the DEP's modeling, arguing that its own data showed the river met the B standard in 298 of 300 sample areas.

According to Goodall, the impasse has both sides considering a new subcategory for the river that creates water quality benchmarks between the B and C level.

The compromise will be discussed Tuesday when the Environmental and Natural Resources Committee holds a work session for LD 154.

Goodall said he's not entirely sold on the subclassification. However, given the political realities, he said it may be the best way to recognize that the river has improved from its current C rating while locking in a higher water quality standard.

There are a couple of sticking points. Environmental groups want to make sure that the subclassification is based on data collection, not the modeling the DEP is using.

In an email update sent to committee chairmen last week, the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay said it is concerned the modeling doesn't accurately represent the water quality of the river. Ed Friedman, who heads the group, said that he was disappointed the majority of the environmental committee didn't support the B rating.

"It is truly sad when maybe less than 1 percent of field measurements are less than Class B, there is not more support on the committee for an upgrade," Friedman said. "It begs the question: If 99 percent compliance doesn't justify application of a goal-based standard, what would?"