

Testimony in support of LD 676 to upgrade the classification of the lower segment of the Androscoggin River from "C" to "B".

Dear Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and Members of the Environment and Natural Resource Committee:

Good Morning, and thank you for considering my remarks in favor of this bill. As a board member of the non-profit organization "Maine Rivers" my comments represent the position of that organization. My comments also reflect my thoughts as a property owner on the Androscoggin River in the town of Greene where I have lived for 30 years.

As you know, the Androscoggin has the unfortunate history of being one of the most polluted rivers in the country. Senator Ed Muskie was sufficiently horrified by its state to introduce and foster the Clean Water Act of 1972. We continue to owe him a debt of gratitude for the huge improvements in water quality the Androscoggin, and indeed the entire country has seen since then. But it's important to note that the goals of the Act remain only partially realized. I'm pleased to speak to you today as part of an effort to bring improvements to this iconic river.

The Androscoggin River has seen gradual improvement in its water quality over many years, and I would argue that this has been associated with great economic gain for communities and land owners along the river. The value of real estate, and the resultant tax base, has risen dramatically. But the river still fails to make improvements comparable to other mainstem rivers in Maine with important urban communities that are now Class B, and further economic gains are "hanging fire" pending fulfillment of those goals.

Nonetheless, towns along the lower segment of the river have upgraded their storm water and sewage management to the point where the river demonstrates CWA category "B" water quality virtually 100% of each year. It's readily apparent that pollution sources in the watershed have changed dramatically over recent years. The improvement in water quality has been repeatedly demonstrated through direct testing of the waters below Gulf Island Dam. That reality is manifested by the remarkable number of cities and towns, including Lewiston and Auburn, who support upgrading the river.

I suggest that this upgrade proposal must lead the legislature to direct DEP to develop a plan to reach "modeling compliant" B standards in this segment of the Androscoggin River. Like many others who are speaking today in support the upgrade, I would like to be a part of discussions to see and assess the alternatives that DEP will develop, with a vision for successfully upgrading the river. I understand that DEP has concerns about certain flow conditions with current discharges. I don't believe it's proper to simply say the river cannot fulfill modelling standards. Factoring in those concerns, we must explore how the river can achieve a B classification. Consideration of the economic and social/health advantages of an upgrade has led communities and citizens along the river to support the concept. The time is right for action.