

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**PUBLIC TESTIMONY OF JAMES F. PROSS, ANDROSCOGGIN LAND TRUST**  
**IN FAVOR OF LD 676**  
**An Act to Reclassify Part of the Androscoggin River to Class B**

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Jim Pross. I am the President of the Board of Directors of the Androscoggin Land Trust. As the committee members have no doubt seen, read, or heard, the Androscoggin Land Trust has played a vital role in bringing awareness and attention to the Androscoggin River Watershed in Androscoggin County. Our service area extends from Jay downstream to Lisbon, where we conserve and manage a total of over 5,000 acres of scenic and natural areas that have environmental, cultural, and recreational value to the communities we serve. Many of our conserved areas within the Androscoggin River Watershed are conserved to protect the water quality of the River. By protecting environmentally sensitive bogs, ponds, and upland waterways, we are working to improve the future health of the Androscoggin River. LD 676 is essential to the future health of the River and the Androscoggin Land Trust strongly supports this important legislation.

ALT works with and is embraced by the business communities in the main population centers that we work in, including Lewiston and Auburn. We provide tangible benefits to the communities we serve by helping to create and maintain special places where people can enjoy the outdoors. While our work is not solely focused on the Androscoggin River, the River's health is central to our mission and our work. We strive to connect people to the River for purposes of outdoor recreation, including fishing, paddling, and hiking along its shores. No where is this more visible than in downtown Lewiston/Auburn where we host an annual river race on the Androscoggin River, week night paddle events in the summer time, and other programming that engages youth on the River. It sends a powerful message about the role that the Androscoggin River plays in our communities when you see 60 people in the middle of the River, in multicolored kayaks and canoes eagerly awaiting the starting gun of our River Race. When you see 20 kayaks and canoes, with families out on the River on a sunny summer night in August, it sends the message that the people who live in L/A want a healthy and clean River to recreate in.

Similarly, through our Teach a Child to Fish program, which we have hosted for years with the support of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, we teach groups of underserved children how to fish, exposing many of them for the first time to the excitement of fishing on the banks of the Androscoggin River. They learn and see that the River is a natural resource for everyone to enjoy. These types of experiences help to cultivate future generations of environmental stewards who learn to appreciate the River as a place that we can all share and use. ALT also organizes a large River clean-up event, where we annually bring together 50-100 volunteers at the beginning of each summer to pick litter off of the riverbanks so that the shores of the Androscoggin River are clean for those fishing children, and for the visitors who come and enjoy Auburn's Riverwalk, or the Barker Mill Trail on a summer afternoon. The tangible results help to make L/A cleaner and more attractive for visitors and potential developers. A healthy and clean Androscoggin River is a critical component of our efforts at ALT.

Similarly, ALT has paid for, developed, and maintained a GPS oriented smartphone application that allows visitors to use their smartphones to take a historical and cultural walking tour of Lewiston and Auburn. The tour highlights significant cultural and historical landmarks as users walk along the Auburn Riverwalk and over the pedestrian bridge into Simard-Payne Park in Lewiston, with narrations and photographs triggered on the user's smartphone as they pass over pre-set GPS points along the Riverwalk. This application provides visitors to the area with an opportunity to learn about L/A's rich heritage while enjoying a walk along the banks of the Androscoggin, enhancing the tangible walking path infrastructure that both Cities have invested in. We cannot sit back and declare the River is clean enough. It is not.

All of these efforts are focused on the River. While non-profit organizations like ours can do our part to make our downtowns more attractive places for investment, *we need the State to do its part to ensure that the waters of the Androscoggin are as clean as possible.* If we treat the River like the invaluable asset that it is, more people will be drawn to it as a resource. This will have positive ripple effects for community and economic development and on land values in Androscoggin County.

All of these programs and efforts along the River are designed to bring people together around the River that runs through our communities. When people are exposed to the beauty of the special scenic and natural areas that we protect, they come to place value on the River. They view it as a special natural resource, worthy of protection, and central to the future of L/A's economic health. The millions of dollars that went into the Riverwalk in Auburn, and Simard Payne Park in Lewiston are a testament to the value that our community places on the Androscoggin River and its waters. ALT is proud to partner with other organizations in our communities to highlight and feature the River as a place that we can all share and learn from.

This bill gives the State an opportunity to take a stand for the economic health of the L/A region and other communities downstream that we are invested in. Please vote ought to pass on LD 676.