



**Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition  
In Opposition to LD 1979**

***An Act To Sustain Good-paying Jobs in the Forest Products Industry by  
Ensuring Consistency between Comprehensive River Resource Management  
Plans and State Water Quality Standards***

**Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee**

**February 28, 2022**

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn and I offer testimony on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) in opposition to LD 1979. The EPC is a partnership of thirty-seven conservation, environmental, and public health organizations who unify around a common agenda every year. The EPC represents over 120,000 members in Maine who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that depend upon a healthy environment. LD 1979 is the one defensive priority bill for our coalition this year.

LD 1979 would thwart the restoration of Maine's great rivers and interferes with science-based solutions for improving the health of Maine's rivers and sea-run fish. The health of Maine's rivers and sea-run fish – including the endangered Atlantic salmon – are threatened by dams that block upstream and downstream migration. Atlantic salmon are on the edge of extinction in the United States. Their survival depends in part on reaching spawning areas on the Sandy River above Skowhegan, but their migration to the Sandy is blocked by Brookfield's four dams on the lower Kennebec River. Other sea-run fish such as American shad, eels, and alewives are similarly impacted.

The four Brookfield Kennebec dams between Waterville and Skowhegan are among the most damaging dams in Maine, and Brookfield has failed to propose adequate fish passage measures at these dams for the past decade.

History demonstrates that dam removal has improved river health. Several harmful dams have already been removed from the Kennebec and Penobscot rivers and enabled dramatically increased runs of sea-run fish, helped wildlife, generated

recreational opportunities, and benefitted Maine's commercial fisheries. The dams on the Kennebec that have parked recent are not very productive and they pose a tremendous barrier to sea-run fish. Conversely, Maine's most productive hydropower dams are mostly farther inland and do not block sea-run fish.

Proponents of this bill claim that that it would protect jobs in pulp and paper mills, but dam removals have never been a threat to jobs in mills. In fact, in the Edwards and Penobscot dam removal projects, mills that needed to move their infrastructure were able to do so at no cost to the mills. The funds for new infrastructure came from the entities that bought and removed the dams.

Federal relicensing which happens once every 30 to 50 years, is in the early stages for the Shawmut Dam. Relicensing provides opportunities to re-evaluate the impact of dams, but Brookfield is trying to limit the authority of Maine's natural resource agencies to participate fully in this process.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is currently developing an Environmental Impact Statement for Brookfield's four lower Kennebec dams, which could determine that the dams are harming endangered Atlantic salmon in violation of federal law. Maine needs to be a full participant in the FERC process, but this bill would disrupt the state's ability to improve the health of Maine's rivers. Maine's natural resource agencies must retain authority to improve the health of Maine's rivers.

Historically in Maine, dam removal has occurred when all stakeholders come to the table to work on solutions that benefit all. This what happened on the Penobscot and at the Edwards Dam. Instead of pursuing this sort of win-win solution on the Kennebec, Brookfield has done nothing but delay and propose fish passage solutions that won't work. Now, by pushing LD 1979, they are trying to weaken Maine resource agencies that have rightfully called Brookfield out for its failures.

LD 1979 is neither constructive nor necessary. We urge the Committee to vote "Ought not to pass."