



# MAKING WAVES

SUMMER/  
FALL 2014

THE NEWSLETTER OF MAINE RIVERS

## THE MEDUX GETS A MAKEOVER By Helena Swiatek, District Conservationist, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Houlton

The view of the Meduxnekeag River from Lowery Bridge shows a beautiful, wide river winding lazily into the distance. What many do not realize is this is an empty desert for many types of fish, including the Eastern brook trout. Recently the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (HBMI) received funding to change all that.

Wide, open streams have become the new normal across most of the country and northern Maine is no exception. But this is not what a healthy stream looks like. Healthy streams have "structure," like rocks that the water moves over and around adding oxygen to the water for fish as it does so. Streams have fallen trees and logs along the banks creating cover for fish to hide from predators. These structures also cause water to flow faster in the channel which helps keep it from heating up. This is important because fish native to northern Maine thrive in cold water. Unfortunately these natural



The Meduxnekeag looking downstream from Lowery Bridge - Photo courtesy of the NRCS

structures were removed from the Meduxnekeag in the 1800's for log drives and have not been replaced. This summer HBMI, in conjunction with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, hope to correct these problems.

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## KENNEBEC RIVER CONFERENCE A SUCCESS



Bill Townsend at the Maine Rivers Conference on the Kennebec

On Saturday, May 10, 2014, Maine Rivers presented a conference on the future of the sea-run fisheries of the Kennebec River. It was held in Waterville on the bank of the river at the Hathaway Creative Center adjacent to the Lockwood Dam. After removal of the Edwards Dam in Augusta in 1999, Lockwood is the lowermost dam on the main stem of the Kennebec River.

More than 120 people showed up. It was not only the quantity but also the quality of attendance that was striking. There were representatives from federal and state fisheries agencies, local government, the business community including dam owners, the NGO community and a wide array of interested members of the public.

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## Medux continued from page 1



Natural boulder supported log jam;  
Photo courtesy of Dr. John Field

Postponed from last fall due to extremely wet weather, the project is slated to begin in late July and will

be a culmination of over six years' worth of work. It began with a study funded by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and undertaken by a fluvial geomorphologist (an expert in river systems), who studied streams in southern Aroostook to determine what was "normal" for northern Maine. HBMI then approached NRCS and subsequently the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture for funding to build the design he created. "Our Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) was a perfect fit for what HBMI was proposing," said Helena Swiatek, District Conservationist with NRCS. With their support, and that of the Maine Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Environmental Protection, and many of the landowners who own property along the river's edge, the stream's structure will be enhanced and restored along the two-mile stretch between Lowery Bridge and Covered Bridge. As one of the largest stream restoration projects undertaken in Maine hundreds of 2-5 foot boulders and large trees will be strategically placed in the stream channel in several different designs, buried and secured to keep them in place during ice-out.

"The long term goal of the project is to promote a healthy stream for the whole community" says Sharri Venno, Environmental Planner with HBMI (and Maine Rivers Board President). "We would eventually like to see salmon back in the Meduxnekeag but in the short term we are promoting Eastern brook trout. Lowery Bridge has always been a good fishing spot for the community and this will just make it better." So this summer if you find yourself driving over Lowery or Covered Bridge keep an eye out for the changes to come.

## Kennebec River Conference

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The Keynote Speaker was Professor John Waldman, a fishery biologist at Queens College, City University of New York. Dr. Waldman is the author of many books and articles on fishery restoration, including "*Running Silver: Restoring Atlantic Rivers and Their Great Fish Migrations.*"

Dr. Waldman outlined the history of the destruction of the once great fisheries of the Eastern Seaboard by overfishing, dams and pollution, and efforts underway to restore them. One of the most cogent points he made is that, of all of the rivers flowing into the western



Atlantic Ocean from Labrador to Florida, he believes that the Kennebec has the greatest diversity of aquatic species, which include Atlantic sturgeon, short-nosed sturgeon, striped bass, American shad, alewife, blue-back herring, rainbow smelt, tomcod, American eel, and Atlantic sea lamprey, and has great potential for survival and recovery of endangered Atlantic salmon.

Several members of Maine Rivers Board of Directors made presentations. Bill Townsend gave a historical overview of the river's progress from a hideously polluted ecological basket case 50 years ago to its present excellent water quality. John Burrows described the fish and their habitat needs. John Banks discussed the sociological benefits to local communities. Jeff Reardon pointed out the physical, social, political and

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economic barriers that need to be overcome. Laura Rose Day and Nick Bennett described the lessons learned from earlier dam removal work at Fort Halifax and on the Penobscot River.

Professor Lynne Lewis, a natural resources economist at Bates College, discussed the economic benefits of restored diadromous fisheries to the Kennebec River Valley and to the Gulf of Maine. Nate Gray, a fishery biologist at the Maine Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), made a presentation on the alewife restoration work already accomplished (roughly half of the historic habitat) and on opportunities for further restoration in the remaining half of the Kennebec Basin, including the Cobbosseecontee System, China Lake and the West Branch of the Sebasticook River.

The afternoon panel on Goals and Plans featured Jeff Murphy of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, Laury Zicari of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Calvin Neal, manager of the Essex Hydro facility at Benton Falls on the Sebasticook River, Oliver Cox, director of the MDMR Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries and Habitat, Bob Richter of Brookfield Renewable Energy Partners, which owns the four lowermost dams on the main stem of the Kennebec, and Skip Zink, eel biologist. Each made a brief presentation and the panel then fielded questions from the floor.

The afternoon ended with an opportunity to network over Alewife Ale furnished by The Liberal Cup. In spite of a late cold spring, the alewives did make it back in time to greet visitors, much to the relief of the sponsors of the conference. No alewives were harmed to make the ale!

Special thanks to Alicia Heyburn, event planner extraordinaire, Landis Hudson, Maine Rivers Executive Director, and Maine Rivers directors and friends including Rick Lawrence, Laura Sewall, Dan Marra, Betsy Ham and Lia Morris who labored behind the scenes, ensuring a successful day. Thanks also to our sponsors, Stantec, the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships at Bates College, Colby College and the Goldfarb Center at Colby, and L.L. Bean. We also offer our heartfelt thanks to the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust for their generosity!

See more photos from the conference on page 7.

## Reactions to the Conference:

"It was a marvelous gathering today in Waterville. Interesting, thoughtful talks, good discussion. Landis did a great organizational job--lunch was really good and the setting was ideal. IT WORKED! All the energy and planning paid off. We went to see the Benton fish lift and had a personal tour by Nate Gray... it was fascinating. I guess that was my favorite finding of the meeting--that the DMR folks and the utility people were really proud of their work together and enjoyed the collaboration immensely. The conference was really a success. Congratulations!" —*Joan Sturmthal*

"Our thanks again to you, Maine Rivers, and all your partners and friends in putting together the Conference on the Kennebec last weekend. It was a great coming together, and, with any luck, a catalyst toward new first steps.

There were many memorable moments for us, but the sweetest had to be listening to the Benton Lift operator tell of the little eel that plucked up its courage and describe it as cute. The most telling, maybe, was the moment when the Brookfield biologist insisted he'd find a way to make shad enter the Lockwood Lift; he might have been the only person in the room who was convinced. Thanks again for all you do." —*Kathy Scott and David Van Burgel*

# CHINA LAKE RESTORATION PROJECT: TO BRING BACK 950,000 ALEWIVES



Project partners on the China Lake Outlet stream project include (left to right) Jennifer Irving, Sebasticook Regional Land Trust, Landis Hudson, Maine Rivers; Ray Breton, Dam owner and Nate Gray, Maine DMR.

With the removal of the Edwards Dam in 1999 and the Fort Halifax Dam in 2008, sea-run fish passage has been established from the ocean directly to the Sebasticook River and to the outlet of the China Lake Outlet Stream in Kennebec County. The successes have been astounding—this year more than 2.3 million alewives passed over the Benton Falls fishway. But the work is not done. Six small dams block access to China Lake from the Sebasticook. Project partners including Maine Rivers are working to reconnect the China Lake Outlet Stream to the ocean by removing dams and installing fish passage. The ecological benefits of the project are of regional significance—China Lake offers 3,850 acres of spawning habitat.

## Progress on the Presumpscot

After reaching an agreement with SAPPI, the owners of Saccarappa Dam in downtown Westbrook, plans for fish passage at this site are in the fieldwork stage. SAPPI, along with Friends of the Presumpscot River, Conservation Law Foundation, and state and federal resource agencies, are beginning studies of the flows and river bottom to determine the best options for

passage at this site. Passage here will open five miles of the river and several tributaries to migratory fish. The Saccarappa is the second Presumpscot Dam. After two years of construction, the nearly five million dollar fishway at Cumberland Mills, the first dam in the system, was completed. Sea run fish are now passing over Cumberland Mills dam for the first time in more than one hundred years.

## Royal River Update

The Town of Yarmouth continues to consider the future of the two dams it owns in the Royal River. Early last spring all seven members of the Town Council voted on a resolution to formally acknowledge the importance of stewardship of the river and affirmed its support for the concept of removing the Bridge Street Dam and making improvements to old fishway on the East Elm Street Dam. A stakeholder process will review options over the winter while Yarmouth's harbor, long prone to sedimentation, is dredged by the US Army Corps of Engineers.



*Volunteers including 3-year-old Gracie Burrows released alewives into Kennebunk’s Alewife Pond as part of a project to improve the health of the Mousam and Kennebunk watersheds. Many thanks to Maine’s Department of Marine Resources for their assistance.*



## “A FEW WORDS FROM THE COUNTY”

By Sharri Venno, Environmental Planner

with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and Maine Rivers Board President

I hope you have enjoyed our article on instream restoration in the Meduxnekeag Watershed (p. 4). Other interesting river developments happening up here include: 1) dam removal and salmon fry release in the Aroostook Watershed, 2) international collaboration around fish habitat assessment and management, and – perhaps most intriguing - 3) an evaluation of three options for the disposition of Mactaquac Dam in New Brunswick, CA – a very large dam on the St John River\* whose functional life span is expected to end in 2030. Look for more details in future issues of *Making Waves*.



**\*Wikipedia facts:** “**The St. John River (French: Rivière Saint-Jean)\*\*** is a river, approximately 418 miles (673 km) long located principally in the Canadian province of New Brunswick but also in, and arising from the province of Quebec and the U.S. state of Maine.” “ Along that portion of the Atlantic shoreline of North America that lies between the St. Lawrence River and the Mississippi River, the St. John River is the second longest waterway; only the Susquehanna is longer.”

**\*\*Maliseet people** call the St. John River “Wolastoq” or in one translation “Bright, Shining River.” They call themselves “People of the Wolastoq”

# FERC TERMINATES EXEMPTION FOR FRANKFORT PROJECT

On May 15, 2014 the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued an Order terminating the Exemption for the Frankfort Project on Marsh Stream in the Town of Frankfort in Waldo County, Maine. Juvenile Atlantic salmon, now listed as endangered in the Penobscot River, have been stocked in this tributary. They should be returning from the ocean, however salmon and other sea-run species remain blocked by a dam located at the head of tide.



FERC's action is an important step toward ending a sad chapter in the history Maine's hydroelectric development. The town-owned dam was converted to hydroelectric generation and granted an exemption from licensing in 1982, creating a situation that hampers efforts to restore migratory fish runs throughout Maine. FERC exempt hydropower projects must comply with migratory fish restoration measures.

In Frankfort, as in other sites, there were multiple problems with the design, operation and maintenance of the fish passage facilities. These were observed and commented on in the ensuing years, yet little was done about them until Atlantic salmon in the Penobscot River drainage were listed as 'endangered' under the Endangered Species Act in 2009. This brought matters to a head. In April, 2012, USFWS filed a lengthy document with FERC outlining in detail the design, operational and maintenance shortcomings of the fish passage facilities for passage of not only Atlantic salmon, but also for river herring and eels. Among the deficiencies cited were lack of access to the fishway at low tide, improper spacing of screens intended to prevent juvenile fish from passing through the turbines,

broken baffles in the fishway, and leakage of the fishway.

FERC notified the Exemptee, Christopher Anthony of Pittsfield, Maine and instructed him to take corrective measures. This began a strange dance characterized by pushing for action on the part of FERC and the fishery agencies and almost

complete inertia on the part of Christopher Anthony.

A consortium composed of the Penobscot Indian Nation, a federally recognized Indian Tribe, and four Non-Governmental Organizations, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Rivers, Natural Resources Council of Maine and Maine Council, Trout Unlimited (PIN and NGOs) took part in the dialog, by filing frequent Comments with FERC both as to the legal obligations of Christopher Anthony and as to why FERC should take appropriate action to overcome his dilatory tactics.

Both FERC and the fishery agencies showed enormous patience with Christopher Anthony yet after almost two years of inaction, FERC had had enough. On February 7, 2014 it issued a Notice of Termination of Exemption. The fishery agencies and PIN and NGOs were unanimous in expressing their opinion that the Exemption should be terminated. On May 15, 2014 FERC took that action. The Exemption is revoked and Christopher Anthony is under orders to remove his generating equipment.

What comes next is unclear. Revocation of the exemption effectively terminates the lease to Anthony. As dam owner, the Town of Frankfort has the obligation to establish and maintain upstream and downstream fish passage. Federal and state fishery agencies are working with the town toward that end.

# CURRENTS



Maine Rivers is pleased to welcome Sam Day as a new Director. Sam, an avid paddler and fly fisherman, will be starting his studies at the College of the Atlantic this fall.



We thank Laura Sewall of Phippsburg, Daniel Marra of Winslow, and Jeff Clark of Bath for their time and energy as Directors.



Welcome, Sam Day!

## MORE FROM THE KENNEBEC RIVER CONFERENCE



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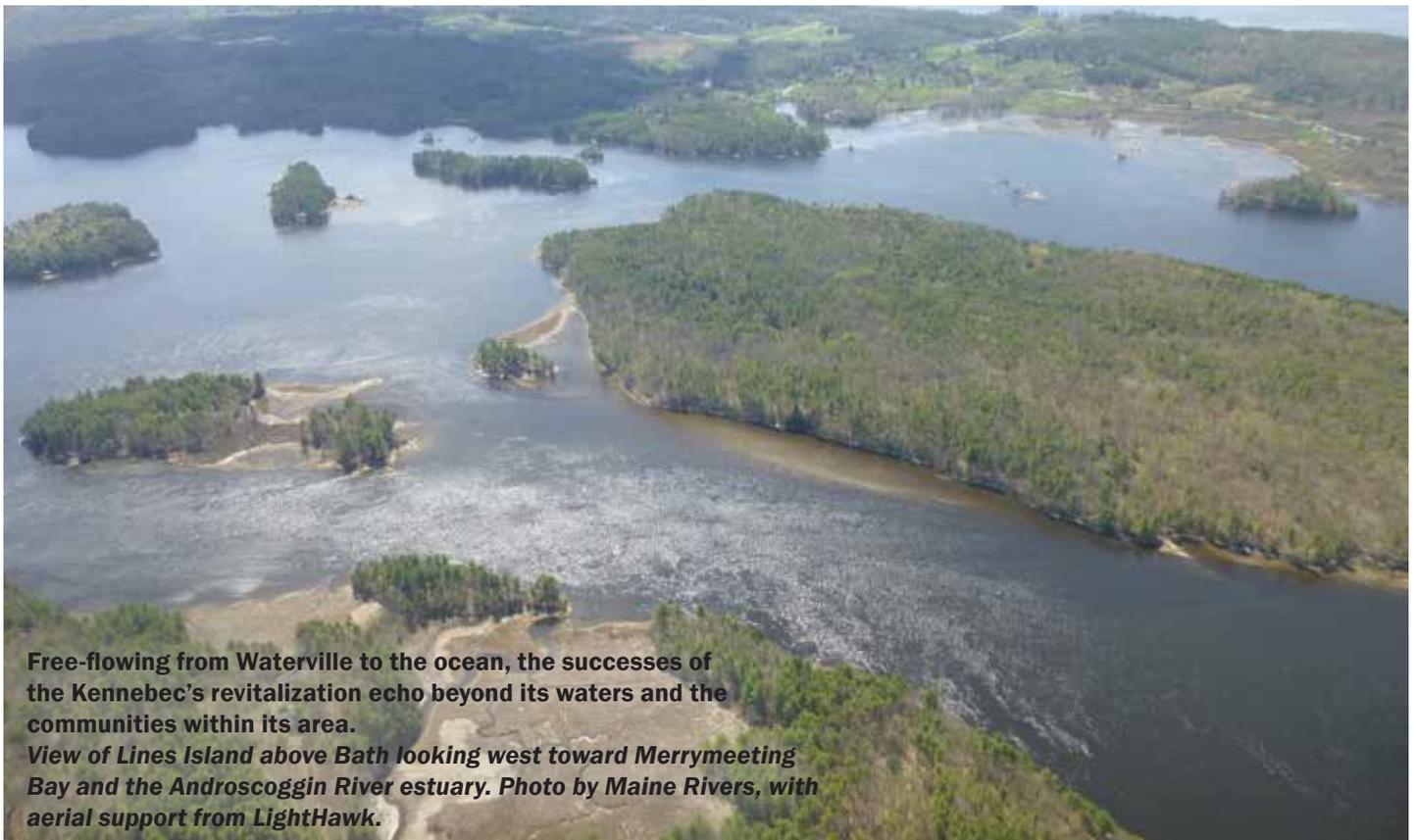
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**Free-flowing from Waterville to the ocean, the successes of the Kennebec's revitalization echo beyond its waters and the communities within its area.**

***View of Lines Island above Bath looking west toward Merrymeeting Bay and the Androscoggin River estuary. Photo by Maine Rivers, with aerial support from LightHawk.***