



# MAKING WAVES

FALL  
2013

THE NEWSLETTER OF MAINE RIVERS

## SKOWHEGAN AND THE KENNEBEC

It says something about the Kennebec River that five of the nine Main Street Maine communities are on its banks: Bath, Gardiner, Augusta, Waterville and, closest to the North Woods and farthest from the Gulf of Maine, Skowhegan. These are towns that have taken an extra step to strengthen their downtowns, and the Kennebec plays

an important role in many of those efforts. In Skowhegan, the waterway runs through the center of the community, rather than along one edge.

“The river is why we have a downtown here in the first place,” says Dugan Murphy, executive director of Main Street Skowhegan. “When Europeans settled the area in the 1700s, they built mills at the falls here. The river is literally at the core of the community.” Yet for many years the river was ignored, considered perhaps good for fishing but otherwise largely forgotten in the town’s collective vision.

The town sits at what was once known as Skowhegan Falls, a half-mile stretch of white water that drops 28 feet in just half a mile. The native Abenakis named it Skowhegan, the Watching Place, for the abundant Atlantic salmon, shad, and other fish that they harvested along its banks. The salmon are long gone these days, blocked from passage by several dams between Skowhegan and Waterville. Large-mouth bass and trout now thrive below the Weston Dam just



The Kennebec River

above the center of town.

Skowhegan developed first as a mill town centered on Skowhegan Island, which splits the river into two channels in the center of town. Using water power from the falls, factories turned out everything from paper to oil cloth, axes to saddles. In 1976 Scott Paper Company opened a huge

modern paper mill downstream from the town, It is still in operation, now owned by Sappi Fine Paper.

The island mills are long gone, and with their loss the river became far less important in the residents’ lives. Like most small towns in Maine, Skowhegan lost many of its downtown businesses in the latter half of the Twentieth Century. Now the town’s leaders are looking to the river as an asset to build a new future.

“It has a lot of potential to be the focal point of our downtown revitalization efforts,” Murphy notes. “It’s already the main attraction for several businesses, such as the Old Mill Pub, where customers can sit on an outside deck and watch the river flow by only a few feet away.”

The Kennebec plays a central role in Skowhegan’s annual River Fest, a celebration of all things river. (Well, the lobster bake might not strictly qualify, but it’s fun.) Canoe races, free rafting rides through the Skowhegan Gorge and an after-dark “glow stick river

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Rafters join in Skowhegan's annual River Fest

run” remind folks that the river is less than a barrier between the two sides of town and more an integral part of Skowhegan’s unique attractions.

“River Fest is only a few years old,” Murphy says. “It picks up where the old Logging Days [a remnant of the era when logs were rafted down the river to various paper mills] celebration left off. The mission now is to demonstrate the recreational potential of the river.”

Murphy also speaks highly of the Run of the River Project, a local effort to develop the Skowhegan Gorge’s potential as a whitewater recreational park. The plans call for hiking trails, improved river access and cleaning up debris left in the river from the old mill and logging days. “We’re hoping it will improve fish habitat at the same time we’re drawing kayakers and canoeists with the whitewater runs,” Murphy says.

The town garnered a certain cachet when it served as the major filming location for the HBO movie *Empire Falls*. Skowhegan’s past as a center of agricultural production is highlighted each year by the seven-year-old KNEADING conference, which focuses on wheat production, milling, baking, and building wood-fired ovens.

Still, Skowhegan is a town facing many challenges, Murphy allows. The Kennebec is one of the keys to overcoming them.

## Grip Hoist to the Rescue! Sunday River Dam Removal Helps Fish Passage

RILEY TOWNSHIP – A remnant log driving dam on the main stem of the Sunday River was dismantled in early September, reconnecting



Remnant log driving dam in the Sunday River before removal

up to four miles of excellent brook trout habitat in headwater streams. The work was done in two days with grip hoists, low tech but effect tools. Grip hoists have been successfully used on a dozen restoration projects in Maine, including



on the Royal, the Narraguagus, Machias and East Machias Rivers.

Log driving dams were built on many

ivers and tributary streams in western Maine to move logs down from the mountains. Over time many of these dams washed away completely or deteriorated to the point where they would no longer impede fish passage. But the base structure of this old dam on the Sunday River stayed remarkably intact, creating a four foot drop that spanned the river. As temperatures rise with global warming, access to cooler waters in high elevation streams will provide important refuge from hot summer weather for brook trout.

The project was a collaborative effort by the Androscoggin River Watershed Council, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife and Project SHARE, funded by the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture administered by the Androscoggin Valley Soil & Water Conservation District. Thanks to Jeff Stern, ARWC Environmental Planner for this update.

## Kennebec Currents by Sam Day

I was two and a half years old when the Edwards Dam on the Kennebec River was removed. My father hoisted me high above his head so I could see over the crowds. Back then, I didn't know what the brown torrent breaking free of those rebar shackles



represented, but after spending over 150 days on the Kennebec each year and speaking to those who walked the water before me, I'm beginning to understand.

I don't remember the days when the river was disgusting. Old timers tell me that the stench would peel the paint off of waterfront buildings. They gasp when they see my friends and me jumping into the river to escape the summer sun. They can't imagine that any fish can live in that "stinky" river, but the truth is they haven't taken the time to experience the river reborn.

Early last summer, my boss and I loaded his skiff onto a trailer and went out after work. He's a former game warden with a camp in Jackman and seventy-some years worth of fish stories. He remembers the days when the river was the capitol's septic system, the county's dumping station. It was the first time he'd been on the river in 30 years. He was left speechless by the changes.

The sky was clear when we launched in Hallowell, at the boat landing where most of my childhood was spent. The water was so glassy that it seemed it would shatter under the weight of the boat. Within a few minutes, I had hooked a smallmouth bass, a non-native species that was as plentiful before the dam removal as it is now.

Small but powerful, it leaped and tail walked. Every other cast toward those familiar shores yielded another tug, another bent rod and a fighting fish. We kept fishing until the sun hung low above the trees.

As the light and the tide receded, we pointed the boat back up river. Suddenly, a darting wake appeared behind my fly and after a silvery splash, my rod doubled over. When I managed to play the beautiful striper to the boat, it spat out a

handful of alewives. As I slipped the hook out of the corner of its mouth, a sturgeon launched itself out of the water nearby. Branches bent under the weight of eagles, and the shriek of ospreys pierced the air. Shad slipped into the turbulence of nearby streams as local kids swam off of the dock.

While many strides have been made in the right direction on the Kennebec, there is still much more to do. There are more archaic dams interfering with the reproductive success of many sea-run species, including Atlantic salmon. I hope that my generation will leave much more than footprints along the banks; I hope we will fill the shoes of those who came before and leave the legacy of a cleaner, healthier river.

—Sam Day, 16, is a resident of Hallowell. He has been a tireless volunteer for mapping and database projects aimed at protecting and restoring Maine's wildlife habitat. Sam is an avid fly fisherman, waterfowl hunter, paddler, and lover of the outdoors.

***“While many strides have been made in the right direction on the Kennebec, there is still much more to do. There are more archaic dams interfering with the reproductive success of many sea-run species, including salmon.”***

# FARCE AT FRANKFORT Or, Patience Is Not a Virtue If You Are a Salmon



Marsh Steam is a tributary of the Penobscot River Estuary, located in the Town of Frankfort northwest of Bucksport. The town-owned dam at the head of tide faces challenges that plague dams throughout Maine and hamper efforts to restore migratory fish runs. In the mid-1980s, the town leased the dam site to Christopher Anthony of Pittsfield, Maine, an energy entrepreneur. The dam was converted to hydroelectric generation as part of the mad rush instigated by federal legislation intended to alleviate the energy crisis of the late 1970s. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued an Exemption Certificate, FERC N0. 6618, for the “Frankfort Project.”

Under the Federal Power Act of 1920, all hydroelectric generation is regulated by FERC; projects over 5 megawatts are licensed for terms of 30 to 50 years while those under 5 megawatts are designated “Exempt.” FERC must approve the project, which must comply with the terms of the Exemption Certificate and is subject to FERC supervision, but the

exemption is permanent. There is no mechanism for periodic review or reconsideration.

State and federal fishery and regulatory agencies may issue conditions for the project for the protection of fish and wildlife. This was done for the Frankfort Project by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) and are contained in the Exemption Certificate.

Marsh Stream is located at the lower end of the river and is easily accessible by fish returning from the ocean, however the dam blocks access. Juvenile Atlantic salmon, listed as endangered in the Penobscot River, have been stocked in Marsh Stream, and the first adults should return from the ocean in May and June, 2014. They will require access to the spawning and rearing habitat upstream from the dam. Other sea run fish species native to Marsh Stream include river herring, sea-run brook trout, rainbow smelt and American eel.

Yet the Frankfort Project has been plagued from the beginning by design and construction flaws, poor operational practices and ineffective follow through by FERC. In April 2012, USFWS filed a 40-page complaint with FERC detailing deficiencies at the Frankfort Project and requested FERC to take action to end 30 years of mismanagement. Anthony’s repeated assurances of action came to nothing, and in December 2012 FERC issued a Compliance Order, followed by a second in January 2013. Schedules for progress were established, with bi-weekly reports to FERC, USFWS and NMFS required. Still, nothing was done.

Given Anthony’s inaction, on August 12, 2013, FERC issued a Notice of Termination of Exemption by Implied Surrender. It gave 30 days to file comments.

Comments in support of termination were filed by the Maine Department of Marine Resources, by the U. S. Department of the Interior on behalf of USFWS, and by NMFS. The Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Rivers, Penobscot Indian Nation, Natural Resources Council of Maine and Maine Council of Trout

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## Farce at Frankfort (continued from previous page)

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Unlimited (the Commenting Organizations) wrote in support of termination.

On September 11 Anthony wrote a letter to FERC promising to install a tide gate “in 10 days.” Received by FERC on September 16, FERC promptly replied to Anthony giving him until Friday, September 27, to complete the work (which is only a portion of the overdue work) and to have it approved by USFWS and NMFS.

On Monday, September 30, NMFS employee Donald Dow went to the site. Preliminary work had been done, but the tide gate was not installed. Dow sent out a report showing the lack of progress. USFWS sent a copy to FERC, pointing out that under the Compliance Orders the tide gate should have been installed by April 1, 2013. It also pointed out that downstream passage corrections scheduled for completion by mid-summer were not done, and there had been no consultation with, or approval by, USFWS and NMFS. USFWS stated it considers that Anthony has failed to comply with the September 27 deadline and with the other scheduled items of the prior FERC Orders.

On October 1, the Commenting Organizations filed supplemental comments with FERC with the

Dow report attached and repeated the call for the exemption’s termination, citing a pattern of unkept promises by Anthony.

On September 30, 2013, Christopher Anthony wrote a letter to FERC stating that “the tide gate has been installed at Marsh Stream,” a statement directly contradicted by Dow’s report on the same date.

On October 1, 2013, much of the U.S. government was shut down. USFWS and NMFS personnel were furloughed. FERC remained open.

During the 16-day shutdown, Anthony added more materials to the fishway. In an undated letter received by FERC on October 18, 2013, he claimed to have completed the tide gate and included two blurry photos. Whether the work meets with USFWS and NMFS agency approval remains to be seen. In any event, he has done none of the other work required by the Compliance Orders.

Christopher Anthony’s failure to comply with his obligation is inexcusable. FERC also bears responsibility. In spite of knowing full well that Anthony makes promises that he does not keep, it has allowed him to get away with doing so. FERC needs to act now.

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## Royal River Update

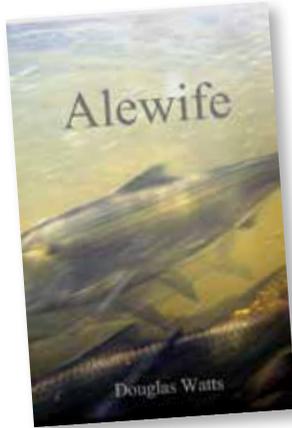
For the past four years Maine Rivers has been collaborating, partnering, spearheading, grant writing, grip hoisting and paddling to improve the health of the Royal River, where two dams owned by the Town of Yarmouth block access to more than 100 miles of habitat for sea run fish. Recently more than 80 people came together to hear about the bathymetric studies, sediment probing and other technical analyses that have been part of the Royal River Restoration Project. Nat Tupper, Yarmouth Town Manager made opening comments about the river he described as “beautiful, historic and somewhat impaired.” He concluded:

*“We take leaps-- big or small-- to move us forward to the vision and values that we think are in the best interests of all and our collective responsibility to both the past and to the future. A salmon or a river herring does not know what comes next when it passes either up or down the river- it just acts on its call. Although with still imperfect knowledge, we have the advantage of being better able to understand what lies ahead, and we should have the same courage to make our leaps and runs whether that is with or against the currents.”*



# ALEWIFE by Douglas Watts

*“A documentary history of the Alewife (Alosa pseudoharengus) in Maine and Massachusetts from 5,000 B. C. to present. With jokes.”*



Much like the creature that is his subject matter, Doug Watts' work punches far above its weight level. It is part science, part history and part the author's narrative of his passionate quest to gain support for a tiny fish essential to the existence of other more charismatic wildlife, including fish (striped bass, tuna, cod,

haddock, trout, salmon and bass), mammals (seals, porpoises, whales, otters, mink, even bears) and birds (eagles, ospreys, terns, herons and kingfishers).

The book details the life cycle of these fish, which are born in the early summer in fresh water lakes and ponds, grow to an inch or so on a diet of microscopic zooplankton, then migrate to the ocean on the fall rains. For the next 4 to 5 years they grow to 12" adults, and return in May to the rivers that flow from the waters of their birth. The numbers are enormous, and need to be, because everything wants to eat them. High in fat, they are a food of choice. From egg to adult, perhaps only 1 in 50,000 survives to reproduce.

Native Americans have a long history with alewives. European settlers quickly learned their value. Watts details these relationships as gleaned from archeological and colonial records. Much of this is captured and engagingly related in the chapter 'The Alewife who went to the U. S. Supreme Court', about the 15 year struggle to compel the South African Pulp and Paper Company (SAPPI) to install fish passage at its hydro-electric dams on the Presumpscot River, the outlet of Sebago Lake.

In the chapter 'Alewives and the Web of Life', Watts relates a spectacular aerial display on the Kennebec River in Augusta involving an alewife, an osprey, a bald eagle and a crow that neatly captures those

relationships. Two other chapters will make your blood boil, or bring tears to your eyes, or both. 'The Curious Case of the Cobbosseecontee' features Atlantic salmon poachers, fingerling alewives dashed to death by a 25 foot drop onto a concrete slab, and a confrontation involving Watts, a badly injured and dying eel and a dam owner. 'They Dammed Paradise and Put Up a Fishing Spot' outlines the decades of mismanagement of fisheries of the St. Croix River, and the long effort to right that wrong, which was only resolved by legislation re-opening the river enacted in 2013.

Doug Watts writes from the heart. His book deserves wide appreciation both on account of the travails of a tiny fish and on account of the dedication of its defenders. Documentation of the consternation over destruction of this resource from colonial times to the present is supplemented by copious reference to the original sources. With jokes.

Poquanticut Press,

131 Cony Street, Augusta, ME 04330, 2012.

To order: [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com), available as a pdf or in paperback.



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# Mousam River Update

Kennebunk Light and Power District owns the first three dams on the Mousam. The aging and inefficient hydropower operations at the dams operate under a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that expires in 2022, however the renewal process must be started by 2017. In preparation for that process Maine Rivers and friends have been working to gather data on the health of the watershed.

At the first public meeting in July to discuss possible relicensing, KLPD shared their assessment of the costs of relicensing -- estimated to be from \$850,000 to \$1,300,000. Installation of fish passage is also expected to be required (there is currently no form of fish passage on any of Mousam dams), adding substantially to the total cost and complexity. While hydropower can be valuable, the amount of energy generated by KLPD's dams is extremely small, approximately \$26,000 per year. At that rate the relicensing process would equal 34 to 50 times the value of the hydropower, not taking into account any of the other broad values of a healthy river.

*We rely on your support. Maine Rivers is a 501©(3) organization. Gifts are tax-deductible.*  
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## CURRENTS



**At the autumn annual meeting** Maine Rivers Board of Directors elected **Sharri Venno** President, and **Laura Sewall** will continue to serve as Maine Rivers Vice President. A long time member of the Maine Rivers Board of Directors, Sharri is the Environmental Planner for the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. In her free time she helps her family maintain Hiram Blake Camp on Cape Rosier. She is a graduate of Colby College with a graduate degree from the University of Maine, Orono.



**Maine Conservation Voters** honored **Clinton "Bill" Townsend** at their annual Evening for the Environment "for a lifetime of passion, leadership, and dedication to protecting Maine's rivers, fisheries, and clean water for future generations." Bill serves on the Maine Rivers Board of Directors and is past President. Bill received a long standing ovation at the award's presentation.



**Maine Rivers** welcomes **Alicia Heyburn** of Brunswick as the Event Coordinator for the Maine Rivers Conference on Kennebec Fisheries. Alicia, a friend of alewives, produced many events and public programs for the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust and works as Project Manager for the Nequasset Fish Ladder Restoration Project in Woolwich.



**Maine Rivers** staff and board members, along with many others testified against revising the rules that govern **open-pit mining** in Maine in October. Speakers shared skepticism and deep concerns about relaxing water quality safeguards. The Bureau of Environmental Protection is charged with reviewing rules developed by the Department of Environmental Protection before sending them back to the Legislature.



**Kudos** to Fred Fauver and Sharon Townshend, Steve Heinz and the Sebago Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and USFWS Gulf of Maine Coastal Program who teamed up to **remove Randall Mill Dam** from Pownal's Chandler Brook, reconnecting the upper brook to the Royal River.



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# Maine Rivers to Organize Kennebec Conference Focusing on Future, Fisheries

The Kennebec River begins at the east outlet of Moosehead Lake and makes a journey of 170 miles to the sea, collecting water from 6,000 square miles before reaching Georgetown and Phippsburg. The Kennebec is Maine's second largest watershed, with 47 towns fronting on the river. The history of the Kennebec is the history of Maine, a working river whose log drives and mills once defined the state's industries.

But what is the future? The sustained efforts to remove the Edward's Dam in 1999 marked a tremendous milestone, changing how people in think about rivers, their potential and their tremendous ecological value as habitat for migratory fish. Science continues to show the importance of linking marine and freshwater systems. Nine years later,



the removal of the Fort Halifax Dam in Winslow opened the door for the restoration of the Sebasticook River, now home to the largest run of alewives on the entire east coast.

Efforts to restore the fisheries of the Kennebec need to continue but must enter a new phase. How can the restoration of sea run fish benefit local economies? What should a 10-year program for Kennebec restoration look like?

Join us on Saturday May 10, 2014 at the Hathaway Creative Center in Waterville to build a path toward this next phase of the Kennebec's restoration.

*Are you on our mailing list? If not, send an email to [info@mainerivers.org](mailto:info@mainerivers.org) and plan to join us in Waterville in May.*