

MPBN 3-31-22

Lawmakers endorse stricter water standards for lower stretch of Androscoggin River

Maine Public | By [Susan Sharon](#)
Published March 31, 2022 at 2:12 PM EDT

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AP

A pair of rowers glide on the Androscoggin River in Brunswick, Maine, where the foliage has changed to autumn colors, Sunday, Oct. 10, 2021.

Maine lawmakers have unanimously endorsed a bill that would upgrade a 14-mile stretch of the Androscoggin River between the Worumbo Dam in Lisbon Falls and Merrymeeting Bay.

Currently, the entire river is designated as a Class C, the state's lowest water quality rating. But, the bill would elevate the lowest section of the river to a Class B, which Ed Friedman and the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay have been advocating for nearly 20 years. Friedman says the higher rating will require better protections for fish.

"When you upgrade, you can't backslide without a very lengthy and official sort of analysis that ends up having to get signed off on by the EPA. So that's really good. And, you know it's just wonderful to finally see the river classified as it actually is, and we hope that the conditions on the river will continue to improve," he says.

Friedman says volunteer monitoring over many years shows conditions in the river have improved. The once heavily polluted Androscoggin was the motivation for Maine Sen. Edmund Muskie's Clean Water Act which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Friedman says the next step will be to push for reclassification of the upper stretches of the river.