



***FREE THE ANDRO* BUILDS TEAM, INFRASTRUCTURE, BRAND AS MOMENTUM BUILDS TO RESTORE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER**

Federal Relicensing of Brunswick-Topsham Dam a Once-In-A-Lifetime Chance to Reconnect the Androscoggin to the Sea for Fish, Wildlife, and Healthy Waters for All

BRUNSWICK, ME – October 2025 – The Working Group driving the statewide effort to open water flows for fish passage between the Androscoggin River and the ocean after more than a century of neglect and blockage at the Brunswick–Topsham dam today announced the appointment of key new members, formation of the group’s non-profit status, and launch of public brand.

“Today’s Androscoggin River is broken and needs to be and can be fixed to benefit Mainers and the marine environment that we all love,” said Charles “Chip” Spies, Founder of *Free The Andro (FTA)*, which is supported by individuals, conservation groups, river towns, and others.

In the wake of recent wins to restore fish passage on the Kennebec River, Yarmouth’s Royal River, Camden’s Megunticook, Freeport’s Frost Gully Brook, and many others, *FTA* is a voice for the Androscoggin’s migratory fish including river herring, shad, sturgeon, and Atlantic salmon that historically used Maine’s third largest river to access inland spawning grounds. Fish populations in the Androscoggin -- and the wildlife and commercial fishing operations that depend on them – have collapsed due to man-made obstructions blocking migratory fish moving to and from the Gulf of Maine.

“We must use the 2029 expiration of the Brunswick-Topsham Dam federal license to assure that any license renewal is dependent upon the ability of abundant, sustainable populations of native, migratory fish to access the upper reaches of the Androscoggin,” said Spies.

New Working Group Members

New members of the *FTA* Working Group are:

- Richard A. Estabrook is a member of the Maine bar and brings experience from Pine Tree Legal Assistance, private practice, and Chief Advocate of Maine's Office of Advocacy. He currently serves as clerk of the State Claims Commission.
- Jym St. Pierre specializes in navigating complex regulatory processes including federal licensing and brings extensive experience working with federal, state, and tribal agencies on restoration projects.
- Bina Skordas, Senior Project Manager and Climate & Watershed Solutions Lead at FB Environmental, brings experience in water resource management and environmental permitting.

These individuals join current Working Group members: Jeff Bush, Vice Chair and Advocacy Chair, TU Maine Council, and *FTA*'s Treasurer; Vlad Douhovnikoff, Associate Professor at Bowdoin College and *FTA*'s Director of Research; Andrew Fisk, Northeast Regional Director for American Rivers; Ray Minchak, President of Merrymeeting Bay Trout Unlimited; Chuck Verrill, President of Maine Rivers and the *FTA*'s Director of Legal and Regulatory Affairs; Tom Walek, *FTA* Communications Director; Gene McKenna, Treasurer, Merrymeeting Bay Trout Unlimited; John Lichter, Professor Emeritus, Bowdoin College; and Steve Heinz, Maine TU Council FERC Coordinator.

"We welcome these new Working Group members and the high level of passion and commitment all of our team brings to the mission of the *FTA* and the future health of the Androscoggin River," Spies said.

Maine Non-Profit

With initial support from American Rivers, Maine Rivers, and Merrymeeting Bay Trout Unlimited, *FTA* was unveiled in early 2025 with a mission to create a voice for the survival of migratory fish that use the Androscoggin River to access spawning grounds by raising community awareness and taking action to improve migratory fish passage as a critical means of returning the river to a functional ecosystem.

Also earlier this year, the towns of Brunswick and Topsham each voted unanimously to commit to actions supporting improved fish passage at the Brunswick-Topsham dam as part the federal relicensing. The Androscoggin River forms the border between the two towns and the dam spans the river between the two towns.

Today, the *FTA* announced that it is seeking structure as a Maine Not-for-Profit corporation. The new structure will give *FTA* stronger intervenor standing in the Brunswick-Topsham federal dam relicensing process and make it easier for individuals and groups to join and support *FTA*'s critical efforts.

New *FTA* Brand

FTA also has unveiled its new logo (see top of press release) to better engage and involve all members of the public and others in the effort to fix the Androscoggin River.

The Brunswick-Topsham dam with its active hydro-power facility is well documented as a significant obstacle to both upstream and downstream fish passage. The just-beginning relicensing process of this dam by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) creates a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with all parties involved to assure that unfettered fish passage is restored to the Lower Androscoggin River to the benefit of fish, wildlife of every kind, commercial and recreational fishers, and everyone who cares about healthy, abundant rivers in our beautiful state.

The citizens of Maine and the residents of the Androscoggin River towns have a real opportunity to reverse the 150-years of damage to the river and its fresh and saltwater fish populations caused by the current Brunswick-Topsham dam and those that came before. When the current license was issued in 1979, Maine US Senator Ed Muskie's Clean Water Act was just seven years old and the badly polluted Androscoggin's ability to ever support a thriving migratory fish population was in question. In the decades that followed, Maine has dramatically improved the river's health to the point where today *FTA* is focusing on restoring vital and abundant fish populations.

Migratory Fish Runs Gone

The Androscoggin River at Brunswick Falls – located immediately upriver from the current Frank J. Wood Bridge on Route 201 linking Brunswick and Topsham -- has been fully or partially blocked by dams since the early 1800s. The current dam was opened in 1983 and includes a fish passage ladder hoped to enable substantial upriver fish movement. However, despite sonar readings and other observations below the dam that show as many as 10,000 shad in a holding pattern, only 14 passed the fishway in 2023 and only 91 in 2024. Similarly, as many as 180,000 river herring pass the dam each year, but habitat analysis and historical records show that this number could easily approach 4 million fish if migration barriers are removed. An increase of that magnitude has been seen on other rivers in Maine when fish passage is significantly improved. But for now, migratory fish runs on the Androscoggin are essentially gone.

On February 9, 1979, FERC issued a license for operation of the Brunswick Hydroelectric Project (FERC Docket No. 2284; "the Project"). That license expires on February 28, 2029, and FERC is now considering issuing a new license pursuant to the Federal Power Act, as requested by the current licensee Brookfield White Pine Hydro LLC (BWPH), a subsidiary of Brookfield Renewable. Any new license, if granted, is expected to run for 30-50 years. The current relicensing process is the only realistic opportunity to require fish passage improvement at this site for generations.

About *Free the Andro*

Established in 2025, *Free the Andro (FTA)* will fight to create unfettered native fish passage at the Brunswick-Topsham dam. The group and its members and supporters seek solutions ranging from dam removal to properly vetted dam redesigns -- supported by solid data from objective research and accepted best practices -- to create abundant and sustainable fish passage.

Further information about the dam and relicensing is available at the Brunswick Dam Fish Passage Website Hosted by Bowdoin College as a neutral clearing house. It provides historical perspective and local views on this matter and welcomes new submissions.

<https://courses.bowdoin.edu/brunswick-dam-fish-passage/local-perspectives/>

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***Free the Andro* Contact**

Chip Spies

chipspies@gmail.com

207-837-3929

Media Contact:

Tom Walek

tom@walekllc.com

917-353-7575