



TOPSHAM UNANIMOUSLY APPROVES RESOLUTION CALLING FOR IMPROVED MIGRATORY FISH PASSAGE AT BRUNSWICK-TOPSHAM DAM

**Topsham Joins Brunswick and Local, State, National Conservation Groups in
Effort to Restore a Healthy River for Critical Fish Species and Surrounding
Ecosystem, Communities**

***Free the Andro* Coalition Sponsors Resolution as Dam is Reviewed for Federal Licensing**

TOPSHAM, ME – March 7, 2025 – The Select Board of the Town of Topsham voted to join the effort to restore the Androscoggin River to health and prosperity after decades of blockage and neglect.

At its regular meeting March 6, the Select Board voted unanimously to support improvement in migratory fish passage at the Brunswick-Topsham dam, to educate residents about the benefits of improved passage, and urged the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the agency charged with relicensing the dam, to fully meet its mission.

In part, the Topsham resolution states:

Now therefore, be it resolved that the Select Board of the Town of Topsham is committed to actions to support improvements in migratory fish passage at the project as part of the FERC relicensing process, while still maintaining the dam's ability to generate power; and

Be it further resolved this Select Board is committed to educating Topsham residents about the consequences of poor fish passage and the benefit of improved passage designs that will help migratory species return to historical levels, while still maintaining the dam's ability to generate power; and

Be it further resolved that this Select Board urges FERC to fulfill its mission to regulate and oversee energy industries in the economic, environmental, and safety interests of the American public.

[The full resolution is here.](#)

“Topsham recognizes that the Androscoggin River is an amazing resource for its residents and for the environment where we live,” said Chip Spies, Founder and Coordinator of the *Free the Andro* coalition. “With this resolution, Topsham also recognizes that the river’s value as an economic resource will be significantly improved by restoring migratory fish runs that support recreation, our lobster fisheries, and other commercial fisherman.

Launched in January 2025, *Free the Andro* creates a voice for migratory fish including herring, shad, sturgeon, and Atlantic salmon that historically used Maine’s third largest river to access freshwater spawning grounds. Fish populations -- and wildlife of all kinds as well as 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.

Brunswick Passes Similar Resolution

In adopting the resolution, Topsham joins the Town of Brunswick, which in January unanimously voted to commit to actions supporting improved fish passage at the Brunswick-Topsham dam as part the FERC relicensing. The Androscoggin River forms the border between the two towns and the dam spans the river between the two towns.

[The full Brunswick resolution is here](#)

“The Brunswick-Topsham dam with its active hydro-power facility is well documented as a significant obstacle to both upstream and downstream fish passage,” said Spies. “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.”

Free the Andro is backed by founding members Maine Rivers, American Rivers, and the Merrymeeting Bay Chapter of Trout Unlimited and seeks additional members and support as it grows.

Andro’s History of Obstacles

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 dams are removed or

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. This relicensing process is the only realistic opportunity to require fish passage improvement at this site for generations.

Free the Andro will fight to create unfettered native fish passage at the Brunswick-Topsham dam. The coalition will support solutions ranging from dam removal to properly vetted dam redesigns -- supported by solid data from objective research and accepted best practices -- to create free 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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