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<https://www.sunjournal.com/2020/03/09/effort-would-upgrade-androscoggin-rivers-water-classification/>

## Effort would upgrade Androscoggin River's water classification

River advocates are hoping to convince state regulators to change the river's water classification from C to B.

By [Andrew Rice](#) Sun Journal



Brittany Davis, center, yells to kids on shore as she floats in the Androscoggin River in August 2019 with her son Carsyn and friends in Lisbon off Ferry Road where they all live. At left is Mariah Stark with her nephew as her twin sister Miranda, right, floats with daughter Madisyn as Abigail Stark jumps around between them all. *Russ Dillingham/Sun Journal* [Buy this Photo](#)

LEWISTON — Local river advocates believe the water quality of the lower Androscoggin River has deserved a “B” rating for quite some time now. Yet, it remains a Class C, according to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

As the state conducts its triennial review of water quality assignments throughout the state, representatives from Grow L+A and the Androscoggin River Watershed Council are pursuing an upgrade, which they argue can result in “economic and quality of life benefits.”

The City Council on Tuesday will host a workshop on the issue. Peter Rubins, chairman of Grow L+A’s river working group, is set to fill in city officials on the details.

According to a memo from Rubins, the group is hoping a section of the river from the Great Falls to Merrymeeting Bay near Topsham will be reclassified, based on a number of criteria that he says the section of the river has consistently met.

State law stipulates that when the quality of any classified water exceeds the minimum standards of the next highest classification, that higher water quality must be maintained and protected. Class C is the minimum standard, with the scale sliding up to Class AA, the highest standard.

“For many years, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay’s EPA and DEP approved water quality monitoring data on the lower river have shown with very few exceptions, compliance with Class B conditions,” Rubins stated in his memo. “Yet the DEP, conflating statutes we believe, refuses to endorse upgrading the lower river from Class C, our minimum standard, to Class B, the standard reflecting actual ambient conditions.”

In every year since 2004, the lower Androscoggin River has met Class B standards for dissolved oxygen.

In 2018, the Department of Environmental Protection recommended that the classification remain at Class C for a section of the lower river between the Durham Boat Launch to Merrymeeting Bay. Its final recommendation stated that “a number of sources of pollution and stressors exist in the watershed.” It said the entire Androscoggin River remains a Class C, due to “a total of 14 dams, numerous dischargers, urban centers (including Lewiston, Auburn, Brunswick and Topsham) and significant agriculture.”

However, in the past decade, numerous environmental groups have strongly disagreed with the DEP’s recommendations.

A 2008 letter from the Conservation Law Foundation said, “CLF believes that the data, including both dissolved oxygen levels and recreational uses shows that existing uses in the lower Androscoggin have improved over time and that the river currently attains” the higher standards for bacteria and dissolved oxygen set forth in the Class B designation.

According to Lewiston City Administrator Ed Barrett, an upgrade to the water quality rating would likely lead to changes relating to the city’s efforts to mitigate the impact of stormwater pollution as well as on the operation of the joint Lewiston-Auburn Water Pollution Control Facility.

He said that as the local organizations have begun to pursue the change, city staff has been reviewing the potential issues.

A memo from Public Works Director Dale Doughty states that upgrading the Androscoggin to Class B would, “in the long-term, be good for the environment, good for area recreation, good for the economy, and good for Lewiston-Auburn’s image in general.”

He said Lewiston has spent millions over the past number of years in managing stormwater, eliminating combined sewer outfall discharges and modernizing the Lewiston Auburn Water Pollution Control Authority plant.

“This has all been done in an effort to meet similar goals to those of the groups wanting to upgrade the river classification in 2020,” he said. “As with all cities in Maine, Lewiston still has work to do to ultimately meet Clean Water Act goals.”

Doughty said if the classification is changed, it would likely impact the city’s future stormwater and CSO permits and waste discharge permits for Lewiston-Auburn Waterer Pollution Control Authority.

“Unfortunately, we cannot tell you today what the additional costs may be over time, but the outcome will be a cleaner and more sustainable river environment,” he said.