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Panel wants tougher standard for part of Androscoggin

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LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — The Maine Board of Environmental Protection recommended that part of the once-heavily polluted Androscoggin River get a stricter environmental classification in an acknowledgment of cleanup efforts.

The recommendation calls for the river's status to be upgraded from Class C to Class B on a small portion, from Lisbon Falls to Merrymeeting Bay.

Several local groups pushed for an even larger section of the river — beginning farther upriver near Turner — to be upgraded.

Any change would need to be approved by the Legislature. State Sen. Ned Claxton, D-Auburn, proposed a bill in the last legislative session to reclassify the larger section of the river.

The river's pollution was one of the motivators for the late U.S. Sen. Ed Muskie, of Maine, to draft the Clean Water Act in 1972.

It "used to be a septic system, an open sewer," and has come a long way since then, Claxton [told the Sun Journal](#).

Upgrading the standard for the lower stretch of the Androscoggin would provide a boost to fishing and recreation, he said.

But not everyone supports it. There are mills and businesses upstream that fear stricter environmental standards could make it difficult for them to operate under certain conditions.

Rivers in Maine are regulated differently depending on classification. The highest rating is AA and the lowest is C.

The state regulates the Androscoggin River from the New Hampshire border to the Ellis River as a Class B waterway, then considers it a Class C one downstream to Merrymeeting Bay.