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STANDISH — The Friends of Sebago Lake and Friends of Merrymeeting Bay are pressuring the state to seek EPA input on Sappi’s plan to remove dams on the Presumpscot River without installing fishway passages.

The paper mill would not include fish passages on the Gambo Dam in Windham and Dundee Dam in Gorham as part of a dam removal project. The two Friends groups want fish passage to extend all the way up the Presumpscot River to Sebago Lake. The plan is still pending before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The Friends groups report that, according to scientists with the Maine Department of Marine Resources, “more than 65 percent of the sea-run fish habitat in the Presumpscot River lies above Gambo Dam.”

As a result, the Friends groups have, according to a press release, “demanded the State seek and receive federal review and approval for this action. Under the U.S. Clean Water Act, the federal EPA is required to make final determinations on state decisions prohibiting native fish passage at federally licensed hydro-electric dams.”

“The DEP draft order and comments of the dam owner cannot be more explicit: they want to legally prohibit passage of native fish on the Presumpscot River in perpetuity,” said Roger Wheeler of Standish, Maine, president of the Friends of Sebago Lake. “The U.S. Clean Water Act and U.S. Supreme Court rulings on the Presumpscot River say this is against the law.”

Ed Friedman of Bowdoinham, Maine, chair of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay said the Presumpscot issue is similar to a situation on the St. Croix River in which a 1995 Maine law banned the passage of native, sea-run alewives and river herring at the Grand Falls Dam.

The Friends groups said “after a finding by EPA that the law violated our Clean Water Act, the Maine Legislature removed fish passage prohibition in 2013. Fish returns on the St. Croix since then have climbed steadily hitting record numbers in 2018, with more than 250,000 river herring and more than 150 American shad, from nearly zero 10 years ago.”

“The Clean Water Act clearly says the State of Maine cannot use (the act) to legally block passage of native fish on Maine Rivers. The St. Croix is proof when historic habitat is reopened, fish will likely return,” Friedman said.



The Friends of Sebago Lake have asked the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to seek approval from the federal Environmental Protection Agency before considering removing fishway requirements at the Dundee Dam in Gorham and Gambo Dam in Windham, above.