

OPINION

Sun Journal

What is right for the river is right for Maine

DEP's course correction holds hope for unleashing the true potential of the Androscoggin River.

I applaud the recent move by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to revisit the International Paper discharge license issued last September. New pollution monitoring data from IP has shed some light on the inadequate policies that the state pursued earlier at the behest of the paper industry. I hope that the willpower being demonstrated in Augusta to finally treat the Androscoggin River as a resource for all of its residents is as strong as the determination of the residents who live here to see their river cleaned up. I urge the governor to continue his support of the DEP, as it takes a bold stand to protect the river, based on science and data.

My wife and I are raising our family in the Androscoggin River Valley, a place with beautiful New England villages, exciting new city centers, picturesque lakes and streams, and friendly, giving people. It is a place where four generations of my family are already laid to rest.

There is, however, one shortcoming to living in this wonderful place, and that is the grand Androscoggin River

NEIL WARD
Guest columnist

Even though many who live in the valley see a cleaner river than we remember from the '60s, it is still not a healthy river.

itself, the very heart and soul of the valley. Even though many who live in the valley see a cleaner river than we remember from the '60s, it is still not a healthy river.

Seat at the table

Over the last year, I have participated in a civic process for the common good. That process began in late 2004, when I heard that the state was going to do something about the river. It all seemed to be murky and confusing at first, but I figured that I wanted a seat at the table representing the generations of my family who didn't get to enjoy the river. I hoped that I might be able to convince the state and the industrial users of the Androscoggin that the river was a "common," (defined by Webster's as "belonging or

relating to the community at large") for all of Maine to enjoy, and not just a place for discharge pipes to end.

Many people involved in the debate over the Androscoggin felt that those of us who were advocating for a cleaner river opposed the paper mills and those who make their living in those mills.

Long-term stability

Nothing could be further from the truth; in fact, we want those jobs to remain part of the economy of the river valley because those of us who live downstream of the mills understand what it means not to have a job. I have seen the woolen mills move south to the Carolinas and the shoe shops where I worked move overseas, which left those in the Lewiston-Auburn area with few employment options. Those of us embroiled in this debate want to ensure the long-term stability of the mills. But that will only happen if the paper industry invests in its future by upgrading and increasing the efficiency of the mills, and not incidentally cleaning up their pollution of the river.

While we were engaged in the heat of the debate, it was hard to do anything more than react to the state and the mills' maneuverings. But there is much more to our position than reaction; there is vision, too, of a river returned to health and vitality for all its communities.

Just imagine

What could the Androscoggin hold for our future?

Just imagine renting kayaks or canoes at a riverside shop to spend a great summer day paddling around near the falls or in one of the upstream impoundments with your children.

Just imagine the wonderful memories you could make by taking your family on a boating picnic on one of the beautiful islands in Gulf Island Pond, and fishing for native trout and salmon.

Just imagine riverside trails that run the length of the Androscoggin where you and your family could hike or bicycle for a day or a week enjoying one of Maine's largest rivers.

Just imagine teaching your children to swim at one of the hundreds of beautiful spots along the Androscoggin.

Just imagine a river-dependent economy for tourist and L-A residents to enjoy running along the banks of the Androscoggin in Lewiston and Auburn.

Just imagine!

These are not wild imaginings. If state regulators do the right thing for the Androscoggin — which is also what is right for Maine — and have the will to continue on their course correction and require the river's polluters to clean up, that is the river we could have. With the state's recent move to require more from the river's biggest polluter, this vision could be-

come a reality. If we stay the course.

Neil Ward is a founding member of the Androscoggin River Alliance.

COLUMNS WELCOME

The Sun Journal welcomes readers to express their views in the hope these expressions provide a forum for debate. The space on this page is generally reserved for guest columns, with preference given to writers in the Sun Journal circulation area who are recognized for their expertise in the chosen subject matter.

To ensure adequate space for many guests, columns are limited to 650 words and must be exclusive to this newspaper.

As with any guideline, there are exceptions, and the Sun Journal reserves the right to edit any column submitted for publication.

Columns may be submitted to the Sun Journal, P.O. Box 4400, Lewiston, ME 04243-4400, to the attention of David Farmer, editorial page editor. For more information, please call 800-482-0759 or 784-7045, ext. 2340.