

CLOSE TO HOME

# River's history flows into cleaner future

An advocate seeks to raise awareness of the Androscoggin's role.

By ISAAC KESTENBAUM  
News Assistant

The Androscoggin River has been a part of Neil Ward's family for four generations.

Ward, who is program director for the Androscoggin River Alliance, will give a presentation about the river at a meeting of the Stanton Bird Club, a conservation organization, at 7 p.m. Monday at the Auburn Public Library.

"I throw in bits and pieces of my family history" connected to the river as part of the talk, Ward said.

His great-grandfather caught wild Atlantic salmon in the Androscoggin. "My dad worked in the shoe shops in Lewiston-Auburn," said Ward.

Ward worked in textile mills along the river before helping to found the Androscoggin River Alliance, which works for



Courtesy photo

Neil Ward, program director for the Androscoggin River Alliance, with his son Ambrose on the banks of the river he works to protect.

"a healthy river, good jobs and strong communities," he said.

The upcoming presentation is based on research conducted by the alliance. Ward will cover the geology of the river and the various industries it has sustained.

The river's many waterfalls made transportation difficult, Ward said. "You couldn't get a boat past Brunswick," he said.

Yet these falls also served to power industry. "That's why it's been so industrialized

## EXPLORING THE RIVER

**WHAT:** The Androscoggin: an Environmental History  
**WHERE:** Auburn Public Library, 49 Spring St., Auburn  
**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Monday  
**HOW MUCH:** Free  
**FOR MORE** information, call 782-5238.

– the height that it falls over the length of the river."

The industry has contributed to river pollution, although things are getting better, said Ward.

"The water quality is slowly improving," he said. "It's not what it used to be, but it's improving."

Last year, 1,200 salmon fry were released into the river by local elementary schools.

When Ward speaks with local students, he's often impressed by their connection to the river.

"They do a lot of science projects related to the river," he said. "They really want to know how clean it is, and what we can do to make it better."

Those who live closest to the river often take it for granted, Ward said.

"They just kind of see it every day and their eyes glaze over," he said. "They don't think of it as part of history. Even today, our communities are connected to the river; even though they don't think about it, it's there."

Ward hopes those who attend his talk will become more aware of the Androscoggin.

"I really don't want them to walk away with anything other than an interest in what the river was," he said, "and where the river will be in 20, 40, 50 years, and what the river potentially has to offer the next generation of Androscoggin Valley residents."

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