

30 November 2017

Susanne Meidel
Maine Department of Environmental Protection
State House #17
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Ms Meidel,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) appreciates the opportunity to recommend changes to Maine's Water Classification Program. Below are five recommendations relevant to conservation activities undertaken by TNC where an upgrade in water classification would afford protection and further secure our investments.

TNC has made substantial investments to improve fish passage and improve the overall water quality in the Penobscot and St John watersheds:

- Upgrade the mainstem of the Penobscot River downstream of the confluence of East and West Branch to Class B. This segment is critical for passage for Atlantic salmon and other diadromous fish to waters of the East Branch. Closure of the two mills on the West Branch has significantly improved the water quality of that branch while the East Branch is already Class AA recognizing its excellent water quality and important ecological and recreational values. The resultant designation below their confluence should be nothing less than Class B to ensure good quality habitat along the entire mainstem of the Penobscot and access to important spawning areas.
- Establish new boundaries for segments of the lower Penobscot. With removal of the Veazie and Great Works Dams, it is recommended that a new boundary be established at the Milford Dam. This will not change the current Class B designation of the segments upstream and downstream of Milford, however it extends existing protection of the special free-flowing habitat designation upriver to Milford. Recent fish returns following removal of the two dams attest to the high value of this fish habitat and restoration potential affecting 11 diadromous species including ESA listed Atlantic salmon, Atlantic sturgeon and shortnose sturgeon.
- Upgrade Fish Stream to Class A. Fish Stream borders and drains the northern portion of TNC's Crystal Bog Preserve, a unique hydrologic feature in northern Maine. While water quality is very good, the Town of Patten had a wastewater discharge which precluded upgrade to Class A. This discharge has been converted to a land-based treatment system and the most current biomonitoring of the stream downstream of Patten indicates Class A quality. This proposed upgrade would apply to waters upstream of Island Falls.
- Upgrade Blackman Stream to Class A. Blackman Stream is the site of another highly successful fish restoration project, the site of the Maine Forest and

Logging Museum, and has its watershed largely within the University of Maine Foundation's Penobscot Experimental Forest.

- Upgrade Salmon Brook to Class A. Salmon Brook in Washburn is the site of a dam removal and stream restoration project. Headwaters of Salmon Brook arise in the Salmon Brook Lake Public Reserve lot. Farms in the watershed have been the beneficiaries of significant nonpoint source control strategies.

Thank you for consideration of these proposals. If you have further questions please contact me at tabello@tnc.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Abello', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas Abello
Director of External Affairs

Suggested statutory changes:

7. Penobscot River Basin.

A. Penobscot River, main stem.

(1) From the confluence of the East Branch and the West Branch to the confluence of the Mattawamkeag River, including all impoundments - Class ~~C~~ B.

(5) From the West Enfield Dam, ~~including the Stillwater Branch,~~ to the Veazie Milford Dam, including all impoundments - Class B.

(6) From the Veazie Milford Dam, ~~but not including the Veazie Dam,~~ including the Stillwater Branch, to the Maine Central Railroad bridge in Bangor-Brewer - Class B. Further, the Legislature finds that the free-flowing habitat of this river segment provides irreplaceable ecological, social and economic benefits and that this use must be maintained.

D. Mattawamkeag River Drainage.

(2) Mattawamkeag River, tributaries - Class A unless otherwise specified.

(c) Fish Stream, below the Interstate 95 bridge - Class B.

F. Penobscot River, minor tributaries - Class B unless otherwise specified.

(18) Blackman Stream and its tributaries, in Bradley, Eddington and Clifton – Class A.

15. St. John River Basin

C. Aroostook River Drainage

(2) (a) All tributaries of the Aroostook River entering below the confluence of the Machias River that are not otherwise classified – Class B.

(m) Salmon Brook and its tributaries, in Washburn, Wade and Perham – Class A.