

Laurie Soucy, Rumford, ME.

I have been a Rumford Resident for nearly 50 years, and my husband and family have been business owners for more than 50 years. I remember when I moved to Maine and Rumford years ago the river was so polluted no one wanted to spend time near the river. The Androscoggin River has now been cleaned up and people fish, boat and kayak along the river in various places. It is a river people want to enjoy and recreate on.

As you know, Rumford used to solely rely on paper making for its economy, but that has also changed. Now the mill is just one part of Rumford, and the economy of the area has declined. However, there is hope that the renewed beauty of the river and the recreational possibilities of the area will help the town prosper again. We need to leverage our natural assets to bring people here who want to recreate, but also want to live.

One recreational asset was a walking trail I enjoyed using frequently in my youth, which Brookfield closed on the southern side of the river. This trail has been used in the community for years. People of all ages walked it to see the falls, kids from the high school biked it for fun, the high school physical education program used it for their bike safety unit, area citizens used it as a way to get to the commercial part of town while avoiding busy Route 2, fisherman used it to walk the river. Suddenly, a decision was made to close the trail, saying it was no longer safe. There was some indication of erosion, and also a large rock above the trail they were worried about. Understanding the concern, there were two local efforts made by Rumford Citizens to write grants to obtain the money to fix the safety issues on the trail, both proposals were denied. The grants were not successful because Brookfield had only obtained one cost estimate for repairs, and federal grants require several cost estimates.

The opening of this trail is crucial for the citizens of our town for recreation, and the draw of tourists to see Rumford Falls, one of the largest waterfalls in the east. I understand, FERC requires hydro projects to create recreational plans around dams so citizens can utilize the property and the public benefits from the commercial hydro operation. Currently Brookfield is not following the past license plan, and there are many concerned citizens, myself included, that worry Brookfield does not see the trail as important for the town and their relicensing plan. As a citizen, I would like to see Brookfield put out a digital survey to town residents. The survey can be distributed through social media, and should include questions about the trail and how it was used before it was closed. There should also be survey questions about how the trail could be used in the future to benefit the town.

In addition to the trail, citizens used to be able to access the property on the north side of the river which has amazing architecture and views of the falls and the reflection pool. This was a picnic area and a place to relax and walk near the river. This access has also been closed by Brookfield, and should be open to the public. I have been there many times as a young girl, when the falls were raging. Everyone who visits should have the opportunity to feel the vibrations from the power of the

falls, and the thunderous sound and awe inspiring perspective of Rumford's amazing waterfall.

The Androscoggin is not the river it used to be. It is cleaner and very beautiful. It is becoming a popular place to boat and fish. There is rumor that huge trout live in the reflection pool, and Maine Fish and Wildlife is considering how to improve the fishery. Maine residents, and those visiting love to fish, and fishing would help boost the economy of the area and improve life for people who live here. This should always be part of the recreation plan for the dam.

Finally, as the Androscoggin becomes more popular for boating, canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding, these uses should be part of any recreational study. This should be part of the electronic survey put out to local residents. Brookfield should be looking at how to improve boating access, how to improve portaging around the dam, and how to provide access for whitewater kayakers below the bypass. Whitewater kayaking was not part of the recreational plan the last time the license was renewed, but has become a new use of the river and should be included. Recreational river releases may even need to be considered, and would be a summer draw for folks to come to Rumford as a recreational destination.

Rumford is a town defined by the river and the falls, therefore it only makes sense that the business making money from the falls has the best interest of the residents in mind. As a citizen, I hope Brookfield can do the most comprehensive study possible, and the dam relicensing plan can include the most positive recreational plan for the citizens. We all need to work together to make Rumford and the River Valley the best it can be.

Sincerely,  
John and Laurie Soucy  
Rumford Resident

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