

Brie Weisman, Rumford, ME.

A resident of Rumford since 2000, I was drawn here by the area's beauty. In 2014, I started walking the trail that connects Route 108 with South Rumford Rd. I was astonished to see a remarkable view of the Rumford Falls that one can only view from this path. Although the path was closed to traffic by gates, locals told me that this has been a beloved trail for generations, having been the South Rumford road prior to its redirection over the bridge above the falls. Despite the gates and fences, hardy local seniors, men and women in their 70s and 80s were still using it as a valuable town feature. Sadly, soon after Brookfield Renewables discovered that this was the case (ironically during a discussion with the town about the possibility of reopening the path) "no trespassing" signs appeared on the gates, closing it to pedestrians as well as vehicles.

I crafted a letter to Brookfield Renewables back in 2015 asking if they could please remove the fences so that locals can continue to enjoy the views unencumbered. The response was that FERC would not allow them because it was dangerous due to the potential of rocks falling from a cliff onto the trail. I could not find any documentation that FERC had expressed such a concern. They also cited concerns about people falling into the falls or river. My research about Rumford Falls history, found no death attributed to falling into the river.

A Straw vote on the town docket in the summer of 2016, "Do the voters support having restored public access to the areas surrounding Rumford Falls with the intent of creating a public trail system". It passed with Yes votes 808 and No votes 288.

Rumford is an economically depressed mill town that has lost half its population due to automation. In order to survive, Rumford will need to turn to the attraction that first brought people here-the falls. The Androscoggin River has become a recreational mecca, providing canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, and fishing opportunities in the summer, and snowmobiling, snow shoeing and cross country skiing in the winter. Reopening the trail along the falls would reinforce both the scenic and recreational opportunities we are becoming known for.

It cannot be denied that the falls are a critical attraction for the town and region. The Rumford information booth sits upon the opposite side of a broad pond at the base of the falls. Cars from many states and Canada are routinely seen in its parking lot, especially in the Spring when the melting snow yields awesome view of raging, misting falls spilling over boulders, roaring with raw power. I stop in to see this spectacle whenever it occurs, and tourists will often ask me how to get closer to the Falls. I have seen cars from as far away as California parked at the South Rumford Rd end of the closed trail, stopping to figure out if that trail might offer a better look, and whether it is wise to ignore the trespassing signs for the spectacle they hope to see. These falls are some of the largest in the East. We should be able to capitalize on them and get people to stop in town and perhaps spend some money in our local

shops. Being able to see the falls up close, or hike the 1.6 mile loop around the falls would encourage that. Across from that same information center, a new hotel is being built; providing a walking trail that offers majestic views of the falls for guests would be a great attraction that would encourage visitors to spread word of Rumford's unique natural beauty.

Brookfield is also denying citizens access to a beautiful historic picnic area that allows a better intimate view of the refection pond and the falls. We are asking that the the picnic area and the falls trail be included in Brookfield recreational plan so that citizens and visitors alike can enjoy this unique, valuable natural wonder.

Thank you for your consideration
Brie Weisman
Rumford Resident.

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