



DEAN BENNETT

### THREAT: LOSS OF WILD AND SCENIC RIVER PROTECTIONS

#### Summary

Once a crown jewel of the nation's Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the unique character of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway in northern Maine is in jeopardy. State river managers are being pressured to dilute or strip protections that safeguard the river's recreational, economic and ecological values. In 2008, the 40th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the state must strengthen, not weaken, protections for the Allagash and, by example, help uphold the integrity of rivers protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act nationwide.

#### The River

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway is a 92-mile-long ribbon of rivers, lakes, and streams winding through the

heart of the largest intact forest ecosystem east of the Mississippi. The banks of the Allagash are home to iconic species such as the pine marten, river otter, moose, loon, and the only breeding population of Canada lynx in the eastern United States. The clear waters of the Allagash provide ideal habitat for one of the largest native coldwater fisheries remaining in the eastern United States.

For generations the Allagash has been a top destination for multi-day wilderness canoeing trips. A thriving industry of outfitters and guides serves visitors from across the country who wish to float a river that shows few signs of civilization. These very characteristics made the Allagash Wilderness Waterway an obvious early choice for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In

1970, the river became the first to be included in the state-administered component of the System. The Allagash's "wild" designation is reserved for rivers that are generally accessible only by trail, and represent vestiges of primitive America.



#### The Threat

Over time, the state of Maine has allowed a growing number of drive-up access points, boat launches, and other intrusions into the Allagash Wilderness Waterway despite a mandate

#### ALLAGASH RIVER AT-A-GLANCE

**RIVER LENGTH:** 92 miles

**WATERSHED AREA:** 1,240 square miles

**LARGEST TOWN IN THE WATERSHED:** Allagash, ME (pop. 277)

**PERCENTAGE OF TREE COVER IN WATERSHED:** near 100%

**DID YOU KNOW?** The Allagash Wilderness Waterway was the first state-managed waterway to be included in the state-administered component of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System.



### The Allagash and Global Warming

Allowing increased development along the Allagash would fragment this wild and self-sustaining ecosystem and reduce the watershed's ability to adjust to global warming. Tree cover is vital for controlling and absorbing storm runoff and providing shade that cools the water, protecting habitat for fish and wildlife. The Allagash contains some of the best remaining native brook trout fisheries in the Northeast and will provide a valuable reserve for these cold water fish as rising temperatures stress populations in more developed areas.

to manage the area for "maximum wilderness character."

An America's Most Endangered Rivers™ listing in 2002 helped initiate a process to bring the river's management plan into compliance with Wild and Scenic Rivers Act guidelines. Corresponding revisions to the Allagash management plan prepared by the Maine Department of Conservation (MDOC) were vetted through a stakeholder advisory council and were on track to be adopted. However, in 2006, pressured by lobbyists for motorsports groups and large landowners in the region, the Maine Legislature passed a bill that halted the process in its tracks. The new statute fundamentally shifted management of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway by declaring temporary structures and 30 summer and winter vehicle access points to be permanent features of the landscape. The law also prevents MDOC from implementing changes to the Allagash's management plan unless approved by the state legislature.

There have been other attacks on the pristine character of the waterway. A logging road along the Allagash was illegally bulldozed open in 2006. In 2008, the state plans to build a massive new logging bridge that will degrade the wilderness experience on a 47-mile stretch of river. There has been no meaningful analysis of alternative bridge locations outside the waterway.

### What's At Stake

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway has provided inspiration to the hundreds of thousands who have experienced its wonder since Henry David Thoreau visited a century and a half ago. Many visitors hire guide services and buy supplies in towns in the region before and after their trips,

boosting local economies. Besides being a recreation paradise and an economic asset, the Allagash provides extraordinary wildlife habitat and connects important ecosystems in Maine's North Woods region.

Upon request from the state of Maine, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway was included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System to protect it for the benefit of present and future generations. Continued erosion of its wilderness character could harm the local recreation economy and irreparably corrupt one of our nation's most pristine water resources. This would be particularly troubling as the nation marks the 40th anniversary of the Act this year. If permitted in Maine, special interests in other states might view this as an invitation to reduce protections for their state-managed Wild and Scenic Rivers.

### What Must Be Done

This is a critical year for the Allagash. The newly created Advisory Council expects to complete a strategic plan for the river by Fall 2008. The Council must encourage the state legislature to affirm the original mandate to enhance the "maximum wilderness character" of the Allagash. The plan should restrict motor access, reduce logging roads and bridges, preserve the native fishery, and designate areas for non-motorized winter recreation. Anti-wilderness interests will likely continue to press Maine's governor and legislature, the state's congressional delegation, and the U.S. Department of the Interior to downgrade protections for the Allagash. These parties must reject all efforts to reduce protections for America's premier state-managed, federally-designated Wild and Scenic River.



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