

THE ALLAGASH: WILD OR MILD?



The year 2006 marked the 40th anniversary of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway (AWW) in northern Maine. In 1970, the AWW was given additional recognition as the first and longest state-managed, federally designated Wild waterway in the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The original 1966 state law specified that the public zone along the waterway is supposed to be managed for “maximum wilderness character.” However, after four decades stewardship of the wilderness in the Allagash is a mixed experience.

In the 1960-70s, much progress was made to restore the AWW. In the 1980-90s, management drifted and anti-wilderness uses expanded climaxing in construction of a massive dam/bridge. By 2002, the Allagash was named one of the Most Endangered Rivers in the U.S. Following the listing, there was movement to improve the wild character of the AWW. However, recent changes in Maine law have reversed efforts to enhance the wilderness character, a massive new bridge spanning the AWW is about to be erected, and the National Park Service has failed to provide a meaningful check on state management.

The national significance of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway is enormous, as is the magnitude of the threats it faces. The AWW could become the first waterway in the U.S. to lose its “Wild” designation. That is why the Allagash was again named one of the ten Most Endangered Rivers in America in 2008.

This richly illustrated PowerPoint talk explains the history of the Allagash as well as how a new state Allagash Advisory Council has launched a strategic planning effort and how conservationists are working through the Citizens to Protect the Allagash (CPA) coalition on a variety of initiatives to restore the wilderness character of the AWW.

Jym St. Pierre has been Maine Director of RESTORE: The North Woods since 1995. He earned a BA and MPS at the University of Maine. Jym has held senior positions in Maine within the Maine Department of Conservation, The Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club. He has also served in many public interest positions, including Citizens to Protect the Allagash (Founding Chair), Maine Allagash Advisory Committee, Maine Public Lands Policy Advisory Committee, Northern Forest Lands Council Advisory Committee, Maine Development Foundation's Leadership Maine Program, Maine League of Conservation Voters (Founding Director), Maine Forest Biodiversity Project (Steering Committee), Kennebec Land Trust (Founding President), and Capital Area Camera Club (President). A Maine native, Jym has visited every campsite and moose hangout within the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

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