



FISH KILLS AND FOREST FIRES

Latest Brookfield Dam Shut-Down Hits West Branch of Penobscot

Massive Fish Kills; Failing Power Lines Spark Fires

Trout Unlimited Calls for Action

AUGUSTA, ME, July 30, 2026 – A two-hour dam shut down and sparks from old electric transmission lines at facilities owned and operated by Brookfield Renewable on the West Branch of the Penobscot River triggered fish kills and forest fires this week.

This is the latest such event, which is estimated to occur once a year and which kills hundreds of landlocked salmon, the State Fish of Maine. The latest fish kills and fires renew repeated calls – so far ignored -- for improved onsite dam monitoring and staffing, and proper maintenance of aging infrastructure.

"Brookfield has shown no inclination to adequately maintain its transmission lines between McKay Station and Millinocket, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has taken no action to change that since a similar event occurred last summer and many times before," said Steve Heinz, Maine Council of Trout Unlimited, representing some 1,500 resident conservationists and sportspersons. "On the current course of inaction, we can unfortunately expect more of the same -- fish kills and forest fires."

The latest dam shut-down occurred Monday, July 27, as a "trip event" at McKay Station at Brookfield's Ripogenus dam. The event shut down electrical generators which resulted in de-watering the Penobscot. Fish kills and damage to the critical aquatic ecosystem were reported by local residents.

According to preliminary research from TU member and retired fisheries biologist Neal Hagstrom, 3,800 to as many as 7,700 landlocked salmon mortalities occurred due to this week's West Branch shut-down.

Also, near the dam and likely triggering the “trip event,” local residents noticed forest fires around the Brookfield dam electric power transmission lines. Locals and Forest Service fire firefighters addressed the burn. Canada-based Brookfield does not staff the Ripogenus dam and power line facility; its only personnel are based more than one hour away.

Mismanagement At Ripogenus

Prior to the July 2026 event, a fire and fish kill tragedy at Brookfield’s Ripogenus dam occurred June 17, 2025, when a trip event resulted in de-watering the West Branch, killing hundreds of fish and starting a forest fire. Many such events have occurred in recent years.

In a January 25, 2024, [letter to FERC](#) in response to [Brookfield’s Interim Plan](#) for Aquatic Resources Protection During McKay Station Outages, Heinz highlighted recurring problems on the Brookfield-controlled West Branch and outlined concrete steps that would address the problems impacting the Upper Ripogenus Gorge area, and iconic Maine sporting areas including Little Eddy and Holbrook. Those steps include:

- Releasing a minimum of 200-400 cubic feet per second continuously from Ripogenus Dam to prevent de-watering, fish kills, and harm to stream ecology;
- Staffing McKay Station rather than calling crews from Millinocket, more than one hour away, as is currently done. This would also address stated Maine Division of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife concerns for public safety that an automated process would entail.

In 2023, dam-related water flow problems on the West Branch below Ripogenus came into vivid perspective following [reports](#) of a dried up river, fish kills, and the elimination of an entire spawning season of salmon. After a summer thunderstorm shut down Brookfield’s Ripogenus dam for five hours in July that year, the company did not explain why it did not release water through other dam gates, nor why technicians arriving long after the shutdown “did not conduct any river surveys for environmental effects.”

In response to complaints about the incident from TU and others, FERC, which licenses and regulates the nation’s hydroelectric dams including Ripogenus, has been investigating the shutdown.



Small sample of estimated 3,800 - 7,7000 fish kill that occurred 27 July, 2026, on the West Branch of the Penobscot River below Ripogenus Dam.

Photo credit: Chris Howe