

AMOSCOGGAN

(ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER)

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

THE NAME "ANDROSCOGGIN" IS LIKELY AN ANGLICIZED VARIATION OF THE ABENAKI WORD "AMOSCOGGAN," WHICH PROBABLY MEANS "PLACE TO SMOKE (OR CURE) FISH."

MANY NAMES--INCLUDING "AMOSCOGGAN"--REFERRED TO FISHING BECAUSE WABANAKI RELIED ON THE SPRINGTIME MIGRATIONS OF SALMON, SHAD, ALEWIVES, AND STURGEON WHO SWAM UP RIVER TO SPAWN.

THESE FISH MIGRATIONS WERE IMMENSE. IN 1673, THE FISHING OPERATION AT THOMAS PURCHASE'S PEJEPSCOT FALLS TRADING POST HARVESTED 40 BARRELS OF SALMON (APPROXIMATELY SIX TONS) IN LESS THAN A MONTH!

During the 1600s and 1700s, Wabanaki inhabited seasonal communities at various points along the river, including Pejepscot (Brunswick), Amitgonpontook (Auburn), and Rockamecook (Canton).

These and other names described particular places along the Androscoggin River. They were more fully places where Wabanaki cultivated responsibilities and relationships.

Colonists changed the river. Heavy fishing and then a dam built at Pejepscot in 1753 reduced fish populations. Later industrial pollution contaminated the remaining fish with toxins like dioxin and mercury.

What is in a name? In a river that Wabanaki named for catching and drying abundant fish, people are now advised by the State of Maine to eat no more than 6-12 fish meals per year from the river.



There are still good reasons for restoring fish runs, including for the health of local ecosystems and Wabanaki relations with those lives and places, but small fish populations and high toxicity levels remind us how colonization challenges Wabanaki's relationships with the waters and lands of their home.