PHOTO BY CHERYL DAIGLE

Penobscot River Restoration Project

The Penobscot Project

The Penobscot River Restoration Project (Penobscot Project) is a collaborative effort to balance fisheries restoration and hydropower production in Maine's largest watershed. NRCM is a proud founding member of this effort and, working with others, has been instrumental in its success.

The project has opened up 2,000 miles of rivers and streams to sea-run fish. It has maintained hydropower production and is one of the nation's most innovative river restoration projects.

Natural Resources Council of Maine

3 Wade Street
Augusta, ME 04330
(207) 622–3101
nrcm.org

IMPROVED ACCESS TO 2,000 MILES OF THE PENOBSCOT RIVER

The Penobscot Project began in 1999. In June 2004, after five years of negotiations, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust signed an agreement for a public-private effort to maintain hydropower and restore sea-run fisheries on the Penobscot River. The Trust completed the project in 2016, and it has vastly improved access for Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish to nearly 2,000 miles of their historic river and stream habitat.

The Trust removed the Great Works Dam in 2012 and the Veazie Dam in 2013 to open up the lower Penobscot River. The Trust also completed a stream-like bypass channel around the Howland Dam in 2016. The Trust had purchased all three dams in previous years. The dams' owners increased hydropower production at six other sites, resulting in at least as much hydropower production as before the dam removals.

Now, communities are developing new economic opportunities and recreational activities related to the river's restoration. Scientists are documenting the benefits of the project, and some Trust partners are improving fish passage on tributaries upstream from the project area.

Project Benefits

The Penobscot River and its tributaries flow from Mount Katahdin through the heart of Maine to Penobscot Bay. It is the largest river system in Maine—draining more than ¼ of the state—and the second largest in New England. The river connects the mountains to the sea, delivering ecological benefits and opportunities for recreation, economic development, and cultural enrichment. The Penobscot Project will benefit the watershed by:

PHOTO BY CHERYL DAIGLE

- Providing unobstructed access to 100% of historic habitat for Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon and striped bass;
- Improving access to 2,000 miles of river and stream habitat for endangered Atlantic salmon and other species of sea-run fish;
- Restoring ecological systems that benefit native plants and animals in the river, estuary, and Gulf of Maine;
- Creating a cleaner, healthier river;
- Supporting the Penobscot Indian Nation's culture and traditions;
- Offering new opportunities for economic and community development in riverside communities;
- Enhancing outdoor recreation such as fishing, paddling, and wildlife watching; and
- Maintaining hydropower generation.

A restored river will help support communities along its shores. Festivals can create jobs and attract visitors. Diverse outdoor recreation options can offer residents and visitors new opportunities to enjoy and explore the river.

PHOTO BY PRRT

The Penobscot Project has restored links between the Gulf of Maine and inland waters. Native sea-run fish—such as river herring and shad—have already rebounded. These fish provide food for many fish-eating birds and mammals, including eagles, porpoises, and river otters. Over time, the increase in sea-run fish populations will help to restore commercial coastal ground fisheries as well.

Signs of renewal are already evident. Sea-run fish are heading into newly accessible habitat. Almost no shad used the fishway at the former Veazie Dam, but this year, nearly 4,000 shad used the new fish lift at the Milford Dam, now the first on the river. Anglers now catch shad in places that were inaccessible to this excellent game fish for a century. Nearly 1.2 million river herring used the Milford fish lift this year, up from essentially zero river herring passing upstream of this area just three years ago. Sturgeon are also reaching their historic spawning grounds and even entering the Milford fish lift! The Penobscot Nation has hosted three national whitewater canoe races on the newly free-flowing river above Old Town.

PHOTO BY J. ROYTE

Energy

Dam owners have increased hydropower generation at six dams in and near the Penobscot River. This has allowed energy generation to remain consistent with previous levels despite the removal of two dams and the decommissioning of a third.

Partners

The Penobscot River Restoration Trust is a nonprofit organization consisting of the Penobscot Indian Nation, American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon, Natural Resources Council of Maine, The Nature Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited.

Key Partners in the Penobscot River Restoration Project include PPL Corporation, Black Bear Hydro LLC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, State of Maine's Department of Marine Resources, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and the former Maine State Planning Office, Penobscot Indian Nation, and the Penobscot River Restoration Trust and its members.

Penobscot River Restoration Project

Balancing the Environment, Economy and Quality of Life in Maine's Largest Watershed

Energy

Medway Dam

West Enfield Dam

Milford Dam

Stillwater Dam

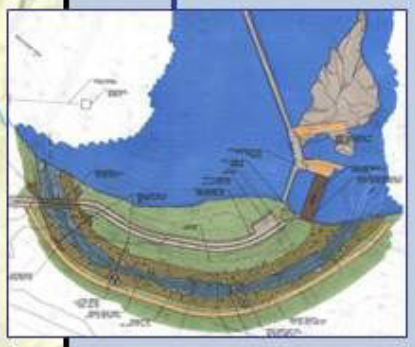
Orono Dam

Ellsworth Project
(Union River)

Fisheries

West Enfield Dam
Existing Fish Passage

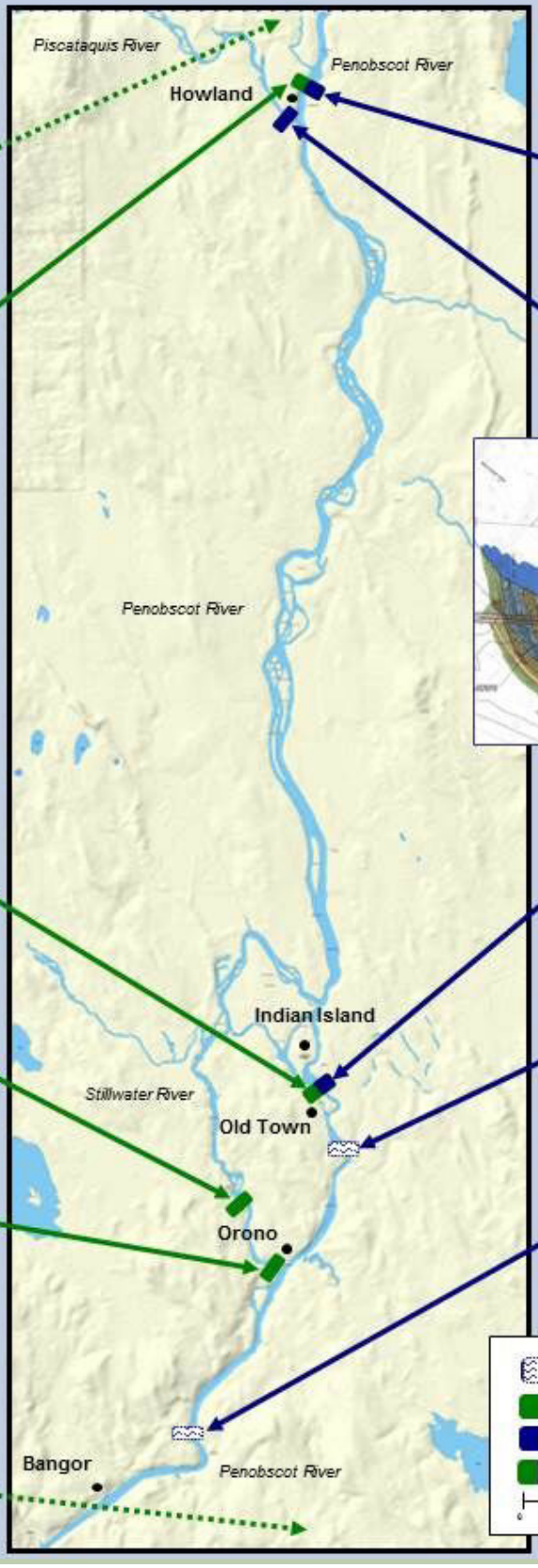
Howland Dam
Decommission / Innovative Fish Bypass



Milford Dam
New Fish Lift

Former Great Works Dam Site
Now Unobstructed

Former Veazie Dam
Now Unobstructed



Natural Resources Council of Maine
3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine • 04330