

News from the Penobscot Partners

A coalition of the Penobscot Indian Nation, American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Maine Audubon and Trout Unlimited

Senators Snowe, Collins Advance \$2 Million Spending Measure to Restore Penobscot River

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(Washington, DC; Bangor ME) Conservationists and the Penobscot Indian Nation praised Senators Olympia J. Snowe and Susan Collins (both R-Maine) for securing a \$2 million line item in the Fiscal Year 2005 Commerce/Justice/State Department appropriations bill to restore the Penobscot River. The bill was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee on September 15, and now moves on to consideration by the full Senate.

Federal funding is critical for implementing an innovative, landmark agreement among business, federal, state, tribal and conservation interests to restore the once-magnificent Penobscot River fisheries, including striped bass, American shad, and the Atlantic salmon and short-nose sturgeon, while also providing the opportunity to maintain more than 90 percent of current energy production. Inclusion of such funding in the current Commerce Department appropriations bill is an important first step.

“I applaud all the groups – both public and private – for joining together to preserve the natural beauty of the Penobscot River and protect its valuable fisheries and wildlife. The Penobscot Partners continue to honor Maine’s tremendous natural legacy, serving as a model corporate-private-public partnership,” said Snowe. “I am pleased that Senator Collins and I were able to secure \$2 million in the Committee-approved fiscal year 2005 Commerce/Justice/State appropriations bill for this critical conservation project. I will continue to work to ensure that this economically and environmentally-sound project continues to get the resources it needs to succeed.”

“The \$2 million provided in the Senate bill will bring us one step closer to the goal of opening more than 500 miles of the Penobscot River to Atlantic salmon and other native fish. It is my hope that we will not only restore a river that flows through the heart of our state, but also restore a portion of our heritage – a heritage that includes the Penobscot Nation, Maine's sportsmen, and the many communities that reside on the banks of the majestic Penobscot,” said Senator Collins.

“I am greatly encouraged that the funding included in the Commerce/Justice/State Department budget by Senators Snowe and Collins will enable us to begin implementing this outstandingly beneficial project for the sake of both the fish that will return to the upper Penobscot and for the people and communities along this stretch of the river,” said Governor John Baldacci.

“This first investment is always the hardest, and thanks to the leadership of Senators Snowe and Collins, we’ve taken an important early step toward successfully restoring the fisheries of the Penobscot River for people and wildlife.” said Laura Rose Day, Director for Penobscot Partners, a coalition including American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Maine Audubon, Trout Unlimited and the Penobscot Indian Nation. “Once again, Maine leads with river restoration efforts to benefit both our state and the nation.”

Widely hailed as one of the most ecologically significant and innovative river restoration efforts in the country, the Penobscot agreement includes the decommissioning and removal of the Veazie and Great Works dams to allow migratory salmon, shad, striped bass, and other fish to move freely up and downstream. The agreement similarly calls for the purchase and decommissioning of the Howland dam and proposes the construction of an innovative fish bypass to allow sea-run fish to swim around the dam. The dams will be purchased from PPL Corporation for approximately \$25 million, and another \$25 million will be needed over the next 8-10 years for implementation costs such as dam removal, fish bypass construction, fish restoration, economic development and mitigation.

The groups called on the full Senate to act swiftly to approve the measure. “We’re committed to working with the Senators and the Department of Commerce on applying the funds to best achieve the goals of the initiative. The purchase of the dams is the centerpiece of the agreement, so funds to purchase the dams are among the most pressing needs,” said Rose Day.

“This encouraging news, coupled with the strong support of Representatives Michaud and Allen in the House of Representatives, means that Congress can soon send this measure to the President’s desk,” said John Banks, Natural Resources Director for the Penobscot Indian Nation. “The appropriation bill funds are an important step toward the restoration of habitat for Maine’s Atlantic salmon and nearly a dozen once-abundant fish species of the Penobscot River.”

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