

# \$555B budget aids Maine

## Funds for Penobscot River fish habitat, LIHEAP in package

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The omnibus \$555 billion budget bill signed by President Bush this week contains much-needed assistance for Mainers struggling to heat their homes and millions of dollars for local conservation projects, including fish passage in the Penobscot River.

Maine's congressional delegation had made home heating assistance a top priority during budget negotiations. The federal spending package approved

by both Congress and the Bush administration contains \$2.6 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Maine will receive a minimum of \$25.5 million in LIHEAP funds in the current federal fiscal year, which began Oct. 1. It also will be eligible for a portion of the \$586 million in emergency LIHEAP funding which the administration can dispense at its discretion.

Members of the Maine delegation are asking the president to release the emergency fund-

ing immediately to help low-income families offset the rising costs of heating oil. More than 48,000 Maine households typically receive money from the federal program.

Proponents of several high-profile land conservation projects also were pleased with provisions of the federal budget.

For months now, those involved with a historic plan to remove two dams and bypass a third on the Penobscot River have been working with Maine's delegation to secure \$10 million for the project.

The final budget lacked an exact dollar figure for the Penobscot restoration project. However, the head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has assured members of Maine's delegation that the project will receive the full \$10 million.

An agreement signed in June 2004 allows a coalition known as the Penobscot River Restoration Trust to buy the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams from power company PPL Corp. The project is expected to open up

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## Funds

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nearly 1,000 miles of habitat to Atlantic salmon, alewives and other sea-run fish now blocked from migrating upstream.

In return, PPL will be allowed to increase power generation at six other dams to offset the losses at the three.

The additional federal money, when combined with private donations and previous federal allocations, will allow the trust to buy the three dams and begin engineering work. The trust then must raise an estimated \$25 million to remove the two dams and build a fish bypass around the Howland dam.

"The Penobscot Indian people — whose homeland includes the Penobscot River Watershed — have waited patiently for many years to see the once great fishery runs of the Penobscot restored," Chief Kirk Francis of the Penobscot Nation said in a statement. The Penobscot Nation is a member of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust. "[The] action by both the Maine congressional delegation

### Maine projects in federal budget

Here is a partial list of some of the Maine projects included in the omnibus federal spending package:

- \$10 million (recommended) for the Penobscot River restoration project.
- \$3.25 million for working forest easements on 24,500 acres near Great Pond in Hancock County.
- \$1.1 million to be shared by the University of Maine and other schools to develop new potato varieties.
- \$4.9 million to be shared by the University of Maine and other schools for research into bioplastics, wood composites and other wood products.
- \$185,000 for research on low-bush blueberry processing and sustainable production.
- \$886,000 for research at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute.
- \$500,000 for Atlantic salmon restoration programs in the Penobscot River.

- \$188,000 for the Lobster Institute's Lobster Conservation, Outreach, Research and Education program.

- \$316,000 for the New England Invasive Plant Center, a joint program involving the University of Maine.

- \$295,000 to construct a new pipeline to redirect wastewater from Presque Isle Stream to the Aroostook River.

- \$295,000 to the city of Ellsworth to acquire land to construct a new wastewater treatment plant.

- \$590,000 to Acadia National Park to acquire 148 acres at the former Pooler Farm in the Northeast Creek watershed.

- \$295,000 for the University of Maine: North-eastern States Research Cooperative to support research beneficial to the northern forests.

**Sources:** Members of Maine's congressional delegation.

and NOAA is as good a Christmas present as we could have hoped for."

The omnibus budget bill also contains \$3.25 million in Forest Legacy funds to buy a working forest easement from GMO Renewable Resources on 24,500 acres near Great Pond in Hancock County.

Maine already had received \$2.2 million in Forest Legacy

funds for another part of what is known as the Lower Penobscot Forest project. Combined, the two phases will prohibit development on more than 42,500 acres stretching from the Sunhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Milford to the west branch of the Union River

Bruce Kidman, spokesman for The Nature Conservancy,

which helped coordinate the project, praised GMO for the company's willingness to work with his organization, the state and other groups.

"They have been really open about conservation, which is very nice," Kidman said. "A lot of the time we approach landowners. They came to us and said, 'If there is interest, let us know.'"