

Bangor festival to celebrate Penobscot River

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BANGOR — A coalition of organizations and businesses will hold a festival on the Penobscot River this weekend to celebrate sea-run fish and raise awareness about efforts to improve the health of the river. The Penobscot River Revival, which will be held on the downtown waterfront, is the culminating event of the first striped bass fishing tournament on the Penobscot.

The fishing tournament has been running since June 21 and wraps up on July 26. The tournament is being organized by the Coastal Conservation Association and is intended to help

gather information on striped bass.

The closing festival, which is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. July 26, will feature paddling trips on the river including rides in a war canoe, boating safety tips, arts and crafts tables, children's activities, more than 30 exhibitors and live music.

The free festival is being organized by a lengthy list of conservation groups, government agencies and businesses.

"It's just a great opportunity to draw attention to the river again and to all of the work being done to improve the health" of the waterway, said Cheryl Daigle with the Penobscot River Restoration Trust,

which is spearheading an effort to remove two dams and bypass a third on the Penobscot. "And it's a way to reconnect people to the river."

The festival grew out of planning for the striped bass tournament, which has been in discussion for about two years.

"The big focus on the Penobscot has always been on salmon," said Dave Huntress with the Coastal Conservation Association. "But people are catching stripers at different times and in different places than you would expect."

Tournament organizers hope participants will help shed light on trends for striped bass, which like Atlantic salmon spend part of their lives in the

ocean and part in rivers. Unfortunately, the tournament on the Penobscot coincides with what some describe as one of the worst years for striper fishing.

Huntress said it's unclear why more people aren't catching striped bass, but the problem extends beyond the Penobscot. Adult Atlantic salmon, meanwhile, have returned in some of the strongest numbers in decades.

Huntress said he hopes striper fishing conditions are improving but that people will go out and have fun no matter what.

"It's been an interesting year," Huntress said. Gayle Zydlewski with the Lower Penobscot Watershed

Coalition said the Penobscot River Revival is based on the annual Spring Running festival held on the Kennebec River in Augusta. Both festivals celebrate the cultural, ecological and economic significance of the rivers. Zydlewski said organizers hope the event will help inform attendees about the entire ecology of the river and how what people do on their land or at home affects that ecology.

But it's also about connecting young people to the river, she said. As an example, Zydlewski recounted how she was fishing for stripers with her young son on the Penobscot recently when an enormous Atlantic sturgeon, which can grow to 6 feet long, splashed in the river.

"He was just completely amazed. It was just a huge animal," Zydlewski said.

The Penobscot River Revival is being sponsored by the following organizations: Bangor Area Storm Water Group, Coastal Conservation Association, Cove Brook Watershed Council, Lane Construction Corp., Lower Penobscot Watershed Coalition, Maine Department of Marine Resources, Maine Sea Grant, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, The Nature Conservancy, Penobscot River Restoration Trust and Sunrise Materials.

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