

Eastern Maine's Groundfish Revival Seen Tied To Rivers

by Ted Ames

Eastern Maine's greatest economic opportunity lies in rebuilding its fisheries. It starts with the Penobscot....

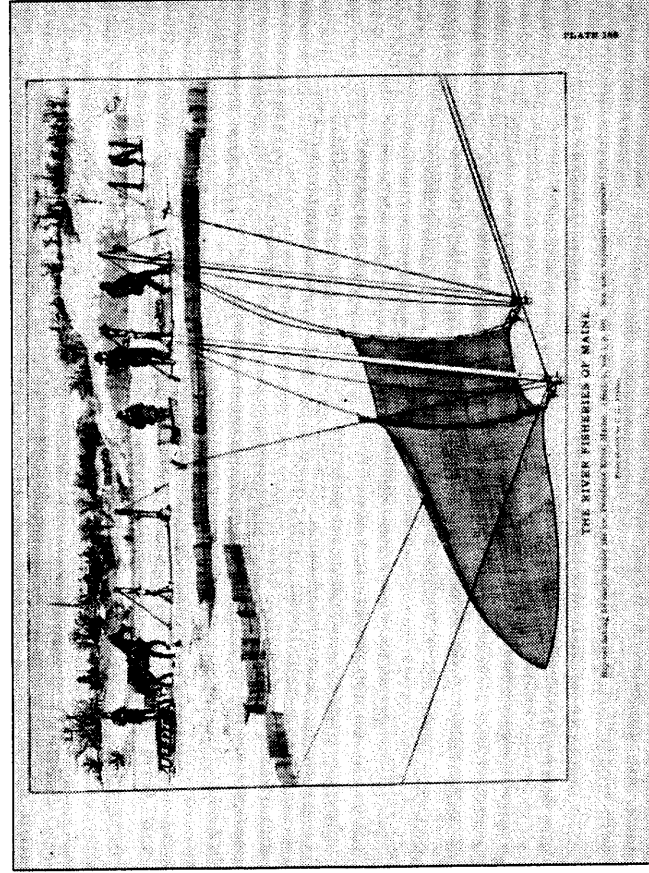
In the past, the goal of rebuilding the state's depleted fisheries has seemed impossible. But times have changed. Scientists have learned much about fish behavior

This could be the secret to make groundfishing in Maine a world-class fishery again.

and ecology and now have tools that could restore Maine's once-prolific fisheries, and that could revitalize the economy of communities bordering Maine's rivers and coast. At the same time, this would increase biological diversity and generate many new jobs in remote areas.

Does this sound too good to be true? Perhaps not.

The first step starts with an opportunity that literally runs through the middle of the state. That is reopening the Penobscot River to anadromous runs of fish; and over time, repeating this with other watersheds. Right now, the once famous stocks of cod, haddock and flounder—the groundfish—are severely depleted in Eastern Maine. Restoring sea-run



THE RIVER FISHERIES OF MAINE

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Sea-run fish migrating up Maine rivers were once a powerful economic driver that generated thousands of sustainable, year-round jobs throughout the state. That potential is still there. The only thing needed to bring back sea-run fish is to remove a couple of dams and let them in. The fish will do the rest.

forage stocks, such as shad and alewives, will attract groundfish stocks, like the cod that prey on them, to the bays and allow the groundfish to rebuild.

The second step would be to apply the same management strategies that were used to rebuild lobster stocks to these groundfish fisheries as they recover.

Sea-run fish migrating up Maine rivers were once a powerful economic driver that generated

of thousands in a reopened River someday. But salmon are just the tip of the iceberg. Maine's rivers and streams once supported huge runs of several different kinds of fish, but only salmon could get past the dams. Before dams closed the Penobscot, there were annual spawning runs of alewives, bluebacks, and shad that numbered in the millions. Along with them were salmon, striped bass and sturgeon.

If Maine reopened its largest river and reestablished sea-run stocks, sportsmen throughout the country would swamp the area. Sustainable runs of Atlantic salmon, shad, and stripers in the Penobscot would spin off benefits to every town bordering a river. The economic boost would be tremendous.

But the key to this opportunity lies in the fact that river towns and cities would not be the only ones to benefit from the revitalized river. The adults and young alike of alewives, shad, and bluebacks are also food for groundfish like cod. The new migrations would draw thousands of groundfish back to the bay and, once again, the river would provide the extra forage base around Penobscot Bay that made it so productive in the past. This could be the

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