

# Penobscot River Restoration Trust

## **Fact Sheet**

The Penobscot River Restoration Project (Penobscot Project), widely acclaimed as one of the nation's most innovative restoration projects, is an unprecedented collaborative effort that will rebalance fisheries restoration with hydropower production in the largest watershed within Maine. Major partners in the project include hydropower companies PPL Corporation (PPL) and Black Bear Hydro; federal, state, and tribal governments; the Penobscot River Restoration Trust\* (Penobscot Trust); and six conservation groups.

The project originated when PPL purchased these dams in 1999. PPL, along with the U.S. Department of Interior, the Penobscot Indian Nation, the State of Maine, and several conservation groups, decided to explore the development of a comprehensive solution to a large number of issues involving hydropower relicensing, migratory fish passage and ecological restoration on the Penobscot River. This commitment formed the basis for the Penobscot River Restoration Project, which led to this vision of river restoration.

### **THE PLAN**

In June 2004, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust signed the Lower Penobscot River Multi-Party Settlement Agreement (the Agreement), a collaborative, far-reaching blueprint for a win-win, public-private effort to rebalance hydropower and sea-run fisheries on the Penobscot River. Key components of the Agreement are:

- The Penobscot Trust received the option to purchase three dams from PPL Corporation and subsequently remove the two most seaward dams—Veazie and Great Works;
- The Penobscot Trust will pursue a fish bypass around the third, Howland, as found feasible by the Penobscot Nation; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Maine Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Marine Resources, and the Atlantic Salmon Commission;
- PPL Corporation received the opportunity to increase generation at six existing dams, which will maintain all of its hydropower generation in the project area;
- PPL Corporation, with the approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will improve fish passage at four additional dams; and
- Communities will continue to have the opportunity to provide input, ideas, and support.

### **PROJECT BENEFITS**

The Penobscot River and its tributaries flow from near Mount Katahdin in the North Woods through the heart of Maine to Penobscot Bay. It is the largest river system within Maine, draining 8,570 square miles or over 1/4 of the state, and is the second largest in New England. Whether delivering critical ecological benefits, new and enhanced recreation and economic opportunities, or stories and traditions, the river is a valuable connection between people, land, freshwater and the sea.

As a model for cooperative conservation, the benefits of the Project are numerous:

- Provides unobstructed access to 100% of historic habitat for “lower river” species such as Atlantic and Shortnose sturgeon and striped bass.
- Significantly improves access to nearly 1,000 miles of historic river habitat for endangered Atlantic salmon and other “upper river” species of native sea-run fish.
- Maintains hydropower generation;
- Restores critical ecological functions that will benefit native plant and animal communities in the river, estuary, and Gulf of Maine.
- Leads to a cleaner, healthier, more resilient river.
- Revitalizes the Penobscot Indian Nation's culture and traditions.
- Offers new opportunities for economic and community development in riverside communities.
- Enhances outdoor recreation such as fishing, paddling, and wildlife watching.

- Resolves a number of longstanding issues and avoids future uncertainties over the regulation of the river while remaining committed to the local community and economy.

The river has been the ancestral home to the Penobscot Indians for more than 10,000 years. Members of the Penobscot Indian Nation look forward to a free-flowing river that will re-connect their homeland to the Atlantic Ocean—an important migration and trade route. An unbroken river will also bring sea-run fish to the nation, making consumption safer and revitalizing opportunities for historic traditions. A restored river will help to strengthen and reinforce the Tribe's cultural heritage and identity.

Benefits of the Penobscot Project extend to the whole ecosystem and the Gulf of Maine. Endangered Atlantic salmon, American shad, alewives, blueback herring, and seven other species of migratory fish are expected to rebound, fueling large-scale restoration of the Penobscot ecosystem and benefiting its diverse wildlife. Sizeable populations of native fish will provide dependable feeding opportunities for fish-eating birds and mammals such as kingfishers, river otters, osprey, and bald eagles. Waterfowl, such as the Barrows goldeneye, will find plenty of winter food in newly open waters; birds of prey stand to benefit from increases in uncontaminated nutrients from the ocean. Over time, the increase in historic herring biomass (alewife, blueback and shad) could help to restore commercial ground fisheries and other vital ecological links between the Gulf of Maine and the Penobscot River—one of the largest inputs of freshwater to the Gulf.

Some types of recreational fishing opportunities will return and others will expand. The removing of the dams will convert impoundments to free flowing river improving water quality and increasing the diversity and abundance of aquatic insects, which are ecologically important to fish and migratory songbirds. New whitewater rapids in the project area will create new canoeing and kayaking opportunities. A downriver trip from Old Town all the way to Penobscot Bay will once again be possible without portages around dams. Wildlife viewing should be improved due to increased species diversity associated with free-flowing river segments, and angling opportunities will diversify over time.

The river has supported the livelihood and tradition of riverside communities and their residents for centuries. A restored river may revitalize economies and create valuable new opportunities for community development. Annual festivals in communities along the river will provide new occasions to enjoy and explore the river; new and diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation should create jobs and attract visitors; and a healthier river will inspire riverfront and other community-wide activities.

## **ENERGY**

Considerable investments in local hydropower generation will at least maintain and possibly increase the amount of energy that was generated when the Project began, with the support of the Trust and other parties, as called for under the Penobscot River Agreement. Energy production at the West Enfield, Medway, and Stillwater dams has already been increased, and the Orono Project was refurbished and brought back on-line in early 2009. As a result, the average annual generation on the Penobscot River has already been increased by approximately 29,000 megawatt hours.

In 2009, PPL Maine sold the majority of their hydropower assets in the Penobscot drainage, except for the dams that the Penobscot Trust later purchased, to Blackbear Hydro Partners, LLC, which operates and manages the projects locally. They have retained the same dedicated local staff that we have been working with since the project's inception. Black Bear Hydro has already invested significant time and resources into its efforts to enhance generation at remaining facilities. The second powerhouses at Stillwater and Orono are under construction, and Black Bear will also be installing turbines in vacant bays at its Milford Project.

With regards to fish passage enhancements, Black Bear Hydro is committed to the terms of the Agreement for the dams they have purchased. In addition, Black Bear Hydro continues to operate the Howland dam under agreements with the Penobscot Trust.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Now that the Penobscot Trust owns the dams, and holds necessary state and federal permits, we are working on the final steps to implement the Penobscot River Restoration Project over the next several years:

- The Great Works Dam was decommissioned and removed in 2012
- The Veazie dam is currently being removed, 2013-2014
- Construct a bypass around the Howland Dam

Other activities include:

- Working with and maintaining support from communities within the project area and the public in general to implement the project and pursue restoration-related opportunities
- Exploring economic and community development activities related to the river's restoration
- Private and public fundraising
- Scientific monitoring to document project outcomes

In addition, Black Bear Hydro will continue to implement additional energy enhancements and fish passage improvements.

**For more information please visit:  
[www.penobscotriver.org](http://www.penobscotriver.org)**

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\* **The Penobscot River Restoration Trust** is a not-for-profit corporation established for the purpose of implementing the core aspects of the Penobscot River Restoration Project. As outlined in the Lower Penobscot River Settlement Agreement, this includes the purchase and removal of the Veazie and Great Works Dams, and bypass or, if necessary, removal of the Howland Dam. The Members of the Penobscot Trust are: 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, the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureaus of Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the National Park Service; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; State of Maine's Department of Marine Resources, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and State Planning Office; the Penobscot Indian Nation; and the Penobscot River Restoration Trust and its Members. Since the signing of the Agreement, additional parties have joined the Project as partners, funders, or supporters.