

# Bangor Daily News

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## FISH AND POWER

A project to open hundreds of miles of the Penobscot River watershed to migrating fish cleared a major hurdle earlier this month when the Penobscot Restoration Trust purchased three dams.

The innovative project links conservation, business and energy interests to rebuild habitat on the river while maintaining, and perhaps increasing, the production of hydroelectric power. For this reason, it has been praised — and partially funded — by the federal government.

In mid-December, the trust purchased the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams for \$24 million from PPL Corp. The Great Works, which is in Old Town, and Veazie dams will be removed and a fish bypass built around the Howland structure, the first three dams fish encounter on the Penobscot River. A fish lift must also be built at the next dam in Milford. Work will begin this summer. Another \$18 million is needed to complete this work.

This will reopen nearly 1,000 miles of river to 11 species of fish, including Atlantic salmon, sturgeon and river herring. Their migration is now blocked by the dams.

Production of hydroelectricity at other dams in the watershed will be increased to offset the removal of these three.

The trust is a partnership of conservation groups, PPL, the Penobscot Indian Nation and state and federal agencies. Bangor Daily News Publisher Richard J. Warren is the chairman of the trust's capital campaign.

"This landmark partnership has proven that business, government and interested citizens can reach mutually agreeable solutions that benefit the community, the economy and the environment," said Dennis J. Murphy, vice president and chief operating officer of PPL's Eastern Fossil and Hydro Generation unit.

To fund the purchase, about \$10 million was raised from private donors. The state's congressional delegation secured nearly \$15 million for the project from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"This may well turn out to be the most important day for Atlantic salmon in the past 200 years," Bill Taylor, president of the Atlantic Salmon Federation, said last week. "The Penobscot project is our best — and perhaps last — chance of restoring a major run of wild Atlantic salmon in the United States."

The benefits extend beyond anglers and others seeking aquatic recreation. In Orono, which is at the confluence of the Penobscot and Stillwater rivers, a dam on the Stillwater was refurbished to increase energy production as part of the project. In addition to producing more clean energy, this led to increased tax revenue for the town, which was used to pay for a new shuttle service between downtown and the University of Maine.

This project shows that environmental restoration and improvement is not just feel-good work, but has benefits far beyond the riverbanks.