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Interior secretary hears pleas of Mainers

Conservation needs outlined in Brewer

BY KEVIN MILLER
OF THE NEWS STAFF

BREWER — Speaker after speaker told top Bush administration officials Wednesday that the Penobscot River restoration plan could serve as the poster child for groups setting aside differences in the name of conservation.

All that's left is for the federal government to fulfill its end of the deal, speakers said.

U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne came to Maine this week as part of a national tour to gather ideas on how to encourage more collaboration between government, private groups, businesses and individuals on conservation and environmental protection.

Roughly 150 people showed up at Jeff's Catering and Conference Center in Brewer to share their ideas on what the Bush administration is calling "cooperative conservation."

And nearly half of the 50 who spoke had the same message:



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY KATE COLLINS

Maine needs more federal money to keep alive the hard-fought restoration plan for the Penobscot.

"If you and the president are serious about cooperative conservation, then I implore you to use your leadership position to secure the necessary funding for this project," said Matt Prindiville, a policy advocate for the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

Negotiated over several years, the Penobscot River Restoration Agreement calls for the removal

of two dams in the Penobscot and bypassing a third in an effort to re-open an estimated 500 miles of habitat for such fish as the endangered Atlantic salmon and sturgeon.

Under terms of the deal, a coalition of conservation groups, government agencies and the Penobscot Nation agreed to buy the dams from PPL Corp. for \$25 million. In return, the groups agreed to allow PPL to increase power generation at several other dams and not to oppose company efforts to relicense the dams.

"It is without doubt the best example of cooperative conservation in Maine and in the nation from our standpoint," said Patrick Keilhey, executive director of the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission, who was speaking at the meeting on behalf of Gov. John Baldacci.

So far the coalition has raised an estimated \$5 million from private donations and been offered about \$3.5 million from federal coffers. But they had hoped to receive about \$18 million from

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Dirk Kempthorne, secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, talks at a news conference

Wednesday at the Acadia National Park headquarters. He also attended a hearing in Brewer.

