

Meetings to focus on salmon seasons

By [Kevin Miller](#)

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State officials will hold two meetings Wednesday in Holden on the future of Atlantic salmon fishing in the Penobscot River.

The first, a public hearing which begins at 6 p.m., is on a proposal to hold a month long fall fishing season for sea-run Atlantic salmon every year on the Penobscot, unless conditions dictate otherwise. The annual catch-and-release fishery would be modeled after the season held in September and October of last year.

The second, which begins immediately after the public hearing, will be a public scoping session on the future of a potential spring salmon fishing season on the Penobscot.

Before last year's fall fishery, Maine's fabled salmon rivers had been closed to salmon angling since 1999. Atlantic salmon had all but disappeared throughout their former range in New England, with the Penobscot representing the fish's last remaining significant foothold in the U.S.

Salmon numbers remain abysmal for virtually all U.S. waters except the Penobscot, which has averaged more than 1,000 adults returning to the river annually in recent years.

After months of discussion and public comment, officials with the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission decided to hold an experimental fall fishery on the Penobscot near Bangor in the fall of 2006.

About 250 anglers bought special licenses for the season. Only one salmon was reported caught, but commission officials nonetheless declared the season a success because it demonstrated that it was possible to allowing fishing without harming the salmon population.

A spring fishery is more controversial, however.

Salmon are at their highest numbers in the Penobscot during the spring as spawning adults leave the ocean and head the rivers of their birth. Historically, the spring season on the Penobscot drew anglers from around the country.

Back in March, the three-member commission decided to hold off on allowing a spring fishery until at least 2008. Commissioners as well as ASC staff said they feared that a well-attended, unlimited spring season could result in unacceptably high fish mortality, thereby threatening the restoration effort.

ASC executive director Patrick Keliher has said that the purpose of Wednesday's scoping session is to hear the public's thoughts and suggestions on a possible spring season, including options to minimize risk to the fish population.

Both meetings will be held in the music and art room of Holden Elementary School, 590 Main Road, Route 1A.

For more information, go to www.maine.gov/asc.