

PENOBSCOT RIVER RESTORATION TRUST

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Invests Nearly \$1 Million To Restore Penobscot River Ecosystem

PRESS STATEMENT

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(Old Town, Maine) Recognizing the large-scale ecological benefits of reconnecting the Penobscot River system and its estuary, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has awarded \$999,900 from the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program toward implementation of the Penobscot River Restoration Project. An unprecedented collaboration between dam owner PPL Corporation, the Penobscot Indian Nation, state and federal agencies, and six conservation groups, the project aims to reconnect the Gulf of Maine, estuary, and inland waters of the Penobscot by restoring 11 species of sea-run fish and other natural river functions while maintaining hydropower generation.

The Fish and Wildlife Service awards the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grants to states through a competitive process.

"This project will provide incredible benefits for fish, wildlife and people. It will help restore the food chain for the Gulf of Maine, benefiting Maine recreational and commercial fisheries," said Marvin E. Moriarty, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Regional Director. "We are delighted to be part of this collaborate partnership to restore the Penobscot."

The Department of Interior is a signatory on the agreement that put the Penobscot project in place. The granting of this award is consistent with its strong support of the project and the key role this restoration effort will play in the recovery and future health of essential coastal habitat in the Penobscot River estuary and bay.

"With this grant, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confirms the tremendous value of reconnecting the Penobscot River, the Gulf of Maine and estuary. Restoring these natural functions will benefit fish and wildlife, as well as renew cultural, recreational, economic and other values that the river can offer to the people of Maine and the nation," said Laura Rose Day, Executive Director, Penobscot River Restoration Trust. "The Trust greatly appreciates the support we are receiving."

The Penobscot River drains over 8,500 square miles in north central Maine and provides the largest freshwater input into the Gulf of Maine. Historically, the fish and wildlife of the Penobscot River thrived in a complex system of connected inland waterways and wetlands to the Penobscot Bay estuary. The migration of sea-run fish spawning inland each year as well as the return of adult and juvenile fish to the sea provided abundant food to the people and wildlife of the river, and contributed important nutrients into both freshwater and saltwater systems.

Today, after swimming through the Penobscot estuary, sea-run fish are impeded by dams— the most significant barrier blocking access to their spawning grounds and other important habitat. The Penobscot Project will open up access through the purchase of three Penobscot dams from PPL Corporation,

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removal of two dams closest to the sea -- Veazie and Great Works -- and decommissioning and proposed construction of an innovative fish bypass at the Howland dam.

In a joint statement, Senators Snowe and Collins said, "This is a very important land and wildlife conservation project for Maine. We are pleased that the Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to support this essential program with the funding."

The project will help restore the functions of extensive riverine, estuarine and marine habitats in the Penobscot. The benefits of the proposal are broad and far reaching and include the restoration of federally endangered shortnose sturgeon, Atlantic salmon and nine other species of sea-run fish to the river, improved habitat for bald eagles, wading birds, and seabirds as well as the re-establishment of once abundant migratory fish that experts believe provided a food source for nearshore populations of cod and other groundfish in the bay and Gulf of Maine.

"The bipartisan support for the project and the continued leadership from Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins and Congressmen Michael Michaud and Tom Allen is critical to our attracting this type of significant federal investment. It will make a difference to the future of this great Maine river," Rose Day said.

The not-for-profit Penobscot River Restoration Trust holds an option to purchase the dams for approximately \$25 million and is actively seeking acquisition funds from a combination of public and private sources. Over \$7.5 million has been raised from private sources. Maine's Congressional Delegation has been instrumental in securing more than \$4.5 million dollars in federal funds to date. Additional support has come from a wide array of supporters, including the state of Maine, tribes, businesses, and local and national organizations.

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The Penobscot River Restoration Trust (the Penobscot Trust) is a nonprofit corporation whose members include the Penobscot Indian Nation, American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Maine Audubon, The Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited, and whose mission is to implement the Penobscot River Restoration Agreement.

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