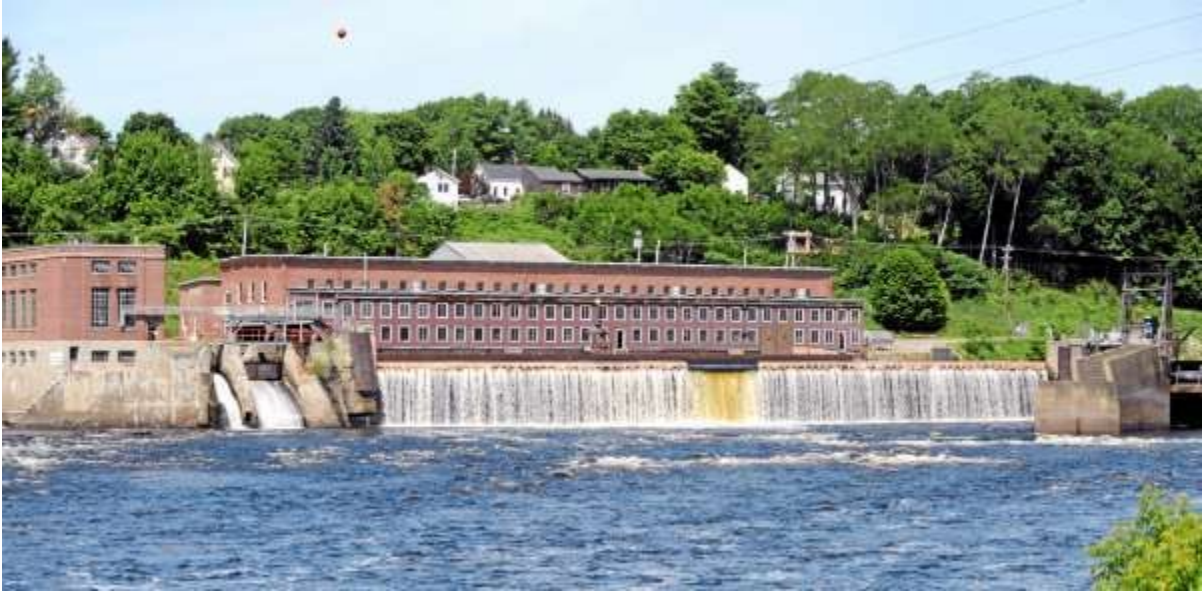


# Penobscot River dam removal, fish restoration project approved



BANGOR DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTO BY GABOR DEGR

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection on Wednesday approved the last of the permits sought for a dam removal and fish habitat restoration project on the Penobscot River. The project includes decommissioning the Howland dam, building a fish bypass, and decommissioning and removing the Veazie Dam (pictured last month) and Great Works Dam. [Buy Photo](#)

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[By Kevin Miller](#)

BDN Staff

AUGUSTA, Maine — State environmental regulators on Wednesday approved the final of three permits sought as part of a historic dam removal and fish habitat restoration project on the Penobscot River.

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection signed off on the [Penobscot River Restoration Trust](#)'s proposal to decommission the Howland dam and build a new fish bypass that will enable Atlantic salmon, shad, alewives and other fish to migrate upstream.

The Howland project is part of a larger, \$50 million proposal to remove or bypass three Penobscot River dams, thereby reopening nearly 1,000 miles of habitat to endangered Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish.

The DEP last week approved permits to decommission and remove the Veazie and Great Works dams, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has already signed off on the three projects.

Now, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust is waiting for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits, after which officials can close on the \$25 million purchase of the three dams from PPL Corp. Laura Rose Day, the trust's executive director, said she hopes the Army Corps permits will be issued within several weeks.

"We would very much like to be removing Great Works, or at least beginning that project, sometime next summer," Day said.

The Howland proposal has proved to be the most controversial of the three due to concerns that invasive northern pike also will use the new fish bypass, threatening the prized brook trout and landlocked salmon fisheries upstream of the dam.

Dana Murch, dams and hydropower specialist at the DEP, said he received comments opposing the Howland project from the Piscataquis County commissioners, the Millinocket Fin & Feather Club, and former state fisheries biologist Paul Johnson.

The department received no comments in opposition to the other two projects, and the vast majority of comments on the Howland dam were supportive of the project, he said.

The DEP permit for Howland acknowledges the potential for harm to native fish species should northern pike use the bypass to access the upper reaches of the Piscataquis River and the West Branch of the Penobscot River.

"Project decommissioning and bypass channel operation should not result in any significant harm to resident fish resources provided that the applicant takes appropriate measures ... to create and-or maintain barriers to the upstream movement of northern pike and other invasive fish at strategic locations in the Piscataquis River watershed."

Pike are a non-native species similar to the pickerel but much larger and with a voracious appetite. They have been introduced illegally by fishermen to other Maine lakes, ponds and rivers, including some lower tributaries to the Penobscot.

Groups will have 30 days to appeal the DEP decision to either the Board of Environmental Protection or Maine Superior Court.