

**Our view:**

# Penobscot agreements breakthrough

A landmark agreement between the Penobscot River Restoration Trust and PPL Energy Corp. to sell, remove and bypass three hydroelectric dams is a blueprint for efforts for improving river habitats.

Last week, in an announcement in Old Town, the trust revealed it raised \$25 million to buy the Howland, Veazie and Great Works dams through a private fundraising campaign and federal allocations.

Water has flowed over these dams for centuries, powering the industrial heyday of the Penobscot River. Now, the Veazie and Great Works dams will be removed, while a fish bypass will be built in Howland. Once complete, a thousand miles of Penobscot River habitat will reopen to runs of native fish, such as American shad, river herring and Atlantic salmon, plus the myriad species they support as prey.

"When the dams come down, the Penobscot system will see ... an aquatic tide of life beginning to surge upstream again," The New York Times said in a praising editorial of Aug. 25.

While the ends of the deal are laudable, they are outshined by its means. In negotiations often viewed as zero-sum by participants, this agreement proves industrialists and environmentalists can find shared ground.

PPL is partner in this effort. The company will also install fish lifts at four other dams along the Penobscot, while increasing electrical output at its dams and re-powering a dam in Orono. Parts from the Veazie and Great Works dams will also be salvaged for re-use at other dams, to boost power capacity.

The result is important preservation of current electrical generation.

This is critical, given Maine's potential for alternative energy. Hydroelectricity, a prime source of the past, is eyed to light the future. Maintaining generation while improving the ecosystem truly is the best of both worlds.

Echoes from this agreement should reverberate along our river, the Androscoggin. Here, river advocates are negotiating with Florida Power & Light about the prospects for improving the river's habitat and amenities.

This process is just starting. The road ahead looks challenging, as each side has its agenda.

But then again, these were the sentiments five years ago, when the Penobscot trust started its work. Its goal — the removal of two dams, plus bypassing another — seemed lofty against the realities of funding and time.

It took a coalition of 10 collaborators spanning Maine and the nation, including several state and federal government and nonprofit agencies. It took stalwart support on Capitol Hill from Maine's congressional delegation. It took an attitude of accepting compromise for progress.

It took persistence to strike this unprecedented agreement, which is the trait Androscoggin advocates should remember. Unmaking a river's industrial heritage is a trying task, which cannot be accomplished with haste.

But as the Penobscot now shows, it can be accomplished.

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