

SCOTT PHILLIPS

Restoring Penobscot will have economic benefits

Much has been reported over the last few years regarding the Penobscot River Restoration Project. Up until now, most of the press has been about the return of the fisheries, the benefits to all wildlife, and the continuation of power generation after the removal of the dams. In addition to all of these great things, I believe we will see other benefits as well. When this project is complete, the people of the state of Maine and the greater Bangor area will see an increase in recreational and economic opportunities.

I have paddled canoes and kayaks my entire life. I have paddled many parts of the Penobscot River drainage including the sections of the river that will be most affected by dam removal. Currently, the section of river from Old Town to Veazie is underutilized for recreation, especially for paddling. Portages around the dams are nearly nonexistent. At best, they are extremely difficult for one to carry a canoe or kayak around.

With the removal of the Great Works and Veazie dams, the river will flow free and paddlers will be able to put in at Old Town and paddle unobstructed to Bangor and on to Penobscot Bay. I am anxious to paddle this free-flowing section of river as my ancestors did for countless generations. I believe many other

people in this area will also be excited to have a "new" and exciting river to paddle so close to home.

I work as a sales representative for Johnson Outdoors, which owns the Old

rented canoes and kayaks on the river. This is an area with a fairly low population base. With the population of Greater Bangor, the potential is significant. In addition, many of Maine's

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Town Canoe Co. among other watercraft-related companies. In my 20 years in the paddle-sports industry, I have been across the United States and Canada working with many people who make their living in this industry, including retailers, outfitters, livery operators, guides, and owners of marinas and summer camps. From my experiences, I see the Penobscot River having huge potential for business opportunities.

Many people in this area do not own a canoe or kayak, but may want to rent one from a livery operator. Other areas in Maine and around the country have built strong economies around renting canoe and kayaks on their local river. The Saco River in Fryeburg is a great example. On any given summer day, there can be hundreds and hundreds of

tourists come here to paddle this "new" and unique section of river.

Some folks who may want to enjoy the river may not have the experience to paddle the river alone, thus may employ the services of a river guide. These customers may be taken down the river in a canoe, kayak or other type of craft.

White-water paddling opportunities abound in central Maine during the spring runoff, but lapse as the water drops in the summer months. There are a few sections of white-water now on the river between Old Town and Bangor, but they are little-used. With dam removal, even more white-water sections will arise as some are now under flat water held back by the dams.

An increase in recreation along the river can lead to many other opportuni-

ties for new businesses. There are a number of paddle-sports retailers now in Greater Bangor. All retailers would benefit from increased sales with added paddling opportunities on the Penobscot River. Old Town Canoe, the world's largest canoe manufacturer, is located in and derives its name from Old Town, Maine, and is one of many businesses and organizations that have endorsed the Penobscot River Restoration Project. Restaurants and hotels in the area and along the river also will be obvious beneficiaries of improved recreational opportunities on the Penobscot.

I wholeheartedly endorse the Penobscot River Restoration Project. In these tough economic times, we need to do everything possible to promote business and economic opportunities when they arise. The removal of the dams and the restoration of the river will provide those new opportunities. The beauty is we can achieve economic development while restoring the river and the fisheries — a win-win.

Scott Phillips of Old Town is the owner of Northeast Outdoor Sports Inc., selling canoes and kayaks to retailers and liveries throughout New England. He is a member of the Penobscot Indian Nation and a Penobscot River Restoration Ambassador.