

Bangor Daily News

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Restoring the Penobscot

I have spent my entire life living, fishing, camping, boating and even working on the Penobscot River. As a child, before the Clean Water Act of the 1960s, I was forbidden to play near the river because it was considered an open sewer. It wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that it occurred to me there might be life in the river because I had never heard of anyone fishing the Penobscot.

I am thrilled about the proposed Penobscot River Restoration Project and its potential to restore not only Atlantic salmon but also other native species such as sturgeon, striped bass, rainbow smelts and shad. The river's sea-run fisheries are decimated. This affects the wildlife of the river and economic and cultural opportunities for people who live here. Decades of experience and money have proved there are too many dams for adult fish to navigate on their upstream migration to spawn and for young fish to get back down without heavy mortality. Many species won't use fish ladders.

Today there is not a self-sustaining run of native Atlantic salmon above three dams. And, with a documented shortnose sturgeon population on the river, we have the opportunity to restore habitat for an endangered species through a project already under way. As good stewards of the Penobscot River and its vast watershed we owe it to ourselves, Maine residents and the nation to do all we can to support one of the largest and most important river restoration efforts this country has ever seen.

The project offers a wonderful opportunity to maintain basically the same level of energy production with fewer dams and to restore the once abundant fisheries. Let's show the world that Mainers still care about our natural resources.

Gary Arsenault
Winterport