

# Bangor Daily News

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## Restoring the Penobscot

The many public and private partners in the Penobscot River Restoration project have made great strides in efforts to restore river herring, American shad, Atlantic salmon, striped bass, sturgeon and other species of sea-run fish to the Penobscot watershed. This past summer, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust notified PPL Corp. that it intends to purchase the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams. This allowed the unprecedented project to move another step closer to rebalancing hydropower energy and restoring native sea-run fisheries. As the Penobscot Trust submitted permit applications required to take ownership and decommission the dams, PPL continued implementing energy increases at its other facilities on the river that will result in maintaining all of its energy production on the Penobscot. When restored, the Penobscot River will bring increased benefits to business, the environment and the communities along the river.

Recent news articles have discussed the possibility that opening up the river through the restoration project will increase the threat of species like northern pike spreading into the river system. Partners in the restoration effort have looked at that concern with state and federal agencies since pike were confirmed in Pushaw Lake in 2003 (pike still have not been confirmed in the Penobscot River and state-led efforts to suppress the population are under way).

The Penobscot Trust contracted with an engineering firm and worked closely with state and federal fisheries experts to assess the feasibility of a trap-and-sort facility at the proposed Howland bypass. It was determined that a sorting and trapping facility with the bypass channel would unlikely be 100 percent effective in preventing passage of pike, and complicate passage for sea-run fish species, particularly shad, by altering hydraulics and requiring that all fish be handled. Experts were also uncertain that the existing dam and fishway are a barrier to pike, particularly at high water levels in the spring. All of the state and federal agencies pre-approved the design for the bypass without a trapping and sorting facility before the Penobscot Trust submitted permit applications.

Project partners fully understand the threats invasive species such as northern pike pose to Maine's valuable native fisheries. They continue to work closely with a multi-agency Pike Risk Assessment Group. That group's report, due out in early March, should provide additional information about continuing efforts to address the presence of pike in Pushaw Lake and the associated risks to

the larger watershed. Natural barriers and dams will prevent pike from reaching much of the Piscataquis drainage. This includes almost all of the native and wild trout and salmon waters.

Unfortunately, no measures can prevent the most likely route for pike to gain access to the Piscataquis — additional illegal introductions like the one that put pike into Pushaw Lake. This sad story of illegal introductions continues to repeat itself. Pike have been illegally introduced into Sebago Lake, the Belgrade Lakes, Sabattus Pond and dozens of other lakes and ponds across Maine — and now into Pushaw Lake.

Since 1983, black crappie, green sunfish, largemouth bass and now northern pike have been illegally introduced into the Penobscot basin. Smallmouth bass and pickerel were introduced decades earlier. These fish have likely had an impact but have not devastated the cold-water fisheries of the Penobscot. One of the best ways to reduce any negative impacts of these invasive fish is to restore the abundance of native fish in the river through the full implementation of the Penobscot project.

The Penobscot River Restoration project is one of the most ambitious river restoration efforts in the world today. Returning thousands of fish to the Penobscot will restore the ecological integrity of the river, provide vast recreational opportunities, improve economies of local towns and, as many believe, aid the ground fish recovery in coastal waters. All this, while maintaining the current green energy production on the river.

As commissioner, I fought hard for the protection of our wild brook trout and I still feel that way. However, I do not believe that the Penobscot River Restoration project should be jeopardized by the threat of invasive species. Where appropriate, safeguards can be put in place as the risk is further assessed.

Since the project was first announced in 2003, there have been many opportunities for community members to comment on the project through informal events as well as formal and legally noticed permitting meetings. Public input has been an important part of moving the project forward, and continues now with the permitting process and opportunities for public comment. More information can be found on the Penobscot Trust Web site at [www.penobscotrivers.org](http://www.penobscotrivers.org).

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