

BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY KATE COLLINS

Crews work to renovate the Orono hydroelectric plant. Set to begin operation in 2009, the plant will add 20,000 megawatt-hours of renewable electricity to area power supplies.

Revival of defunct Orono hydropower plant to restore fish passage on Penobscot River

BY KEVIN MILLER
OF THE NEWS STAFF

ORONO — A power company is preparing to revive the old Orono hydroelectric plant early next year as part of the historic agreement to restore fish passage on the Penobscot River.

Later this month, a contractor

is expected to begin construction on new "penstocks" that carry water from the dam near downtown Orono to the nearby powerhouse and turbines. Crews from facility owner PPL Corp. are also rebuilding and reconditioning the turbines and generators in order to begin producing electricity.

If all goes according to plan, the Orono hydroelectric plant could be on line by Jan. 1 for the first time since the facility's aging penstocks failed in 1996. The company hopes to produce up to 20,000 megawatt-hours of electricity annually at the facility, according to Dick Fennelly, manager of generating assets for PPL-Maine.

"Usually, the question we get is will it change the elevation" of the river, Fennelly said. "The elevation will stay the same and the water flow will stay about the same."

PPL Corp. is recommissioning the Orono plant and increasing power generation at several other hydroelectric facilities as

part of a landmark pact to reopen nearly 1,000 miles of fish habitat within the Penobscot River watershed.

A coalition of groups and government agencies spent years negotiating an agreement with PPL that would restore passage for Atlantic salmon,

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Plant

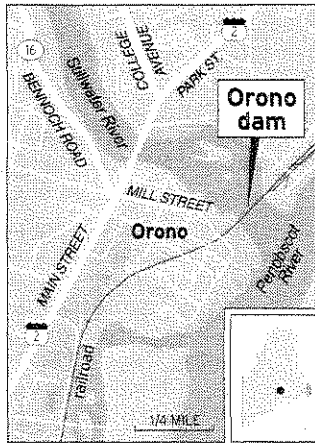
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sturgeon and other sea-run species without reducing hydropower generation.

Under the terms of the 2004 agreement, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust agreed to pay \$25 million to purchase the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams from PPL Corp. The trust then plans to remove the Veazie and Great Works dams and build a state-of-the-art fish passage around the Howland dam.

Despite the dam closures, PPL will recoup 94 percent of its generation capacity by reviving the Orono facility and making changes at five of its other remaining dams, Fennelly said. The company also plans to install additional powerhouses at both the Orono and Stillwater dams between 2010 and 2015.

Orono Town Manager Catherine Conlow credited PPL with



BANGOR DAILY NEWS MAP BY ERIC ZELZ

addressing any concerns raised by town officials. She said the project is part of the bigger picture of restoring free-flowing waters on the river and that reviving the hydroelectric plant is not expected to pose any problems for the town.

"We're excited about the long-term outcome of what happens

when the dam is removed in Veazie," Conlow said.

The Penobscot River Restoration Trust recently completed its \$25 million capital campaign to purchase the three dams. Laura Rose Day, executive director of the trust, said staff members are busy wrapping up the technical details of the purchase. The organization will then have to raise an additional \$25 million to remove the two dams and bypass the third.

Day said she was pleased that PPL was moving forward with the planned upgrade at the Orono facility. She described the overall project as "positive for energy as well as fisheries."

The groups involved in the Penobscot River Restoration Trust are the Penobscot Nation, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Natural Resources Council of Maine and American Rivers.

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY KATE COLLINS

Out of service for more than a decade, the pump house of the Orono hydroelectric plant is being renovated by PPL to once again generate electricity.