

**Testimony at Penobscot River Restoration Hearing, May 7, 2009 by Richard Jagels,
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In the early 20th century, Bangor, Maine was a world-renowned destination for those who sought the capture of sea-run Atlantic salmon by rod and reel. Legendary bamboo rod makers Hiram L. Leonard and Fred E. Thomas each began their careers in Bangor, custom building salmon rods for the famous and not so famous who gathered from around the globe each spring to fish the Bangor Pool. Specially designed, maneuverable, double-ender boats, generally called peapods, were used to cover all parts of the river. A few old timers in the area still remember this fishing method, known as *harling*, and fondly speak of the Bangor pool peapods that dotted the river each spring as the yearly migration of salmon began. One of the more prominent builders of the peapods used on the Penobscot was Karl Andersen, a Norwegian immigrant (perhaps the person who introduced *harling* to the Bangor area). On April 1, 1912 (one year after the disastrous fire that swept through Bangor, devastating half the city) Karl decided to send one of two salmon he caught on opening day to the President of the United States, William Howard Taft – setting in motion a tradition that lasted, on and off, for more than eight decades.

So it was that Bangor and the surrounding communities benefited culturally and economically for many decades as a consequence of the migration of salmon to their spawning grounds miles up the Penobscot River. The dramatic reductions in those migratory runs has slowly and inexorably eroded the economic and cultural benefits for the region, and has relegated salmon sport fishing on the Penobscot to a footnote in history. Among the many factors that led to the decline in salmon migration, one could cite the log drives and, later, the paper mills. But one could also argue that these two industries at least provided economic benefits and a vibrant culture. The log drives are only a distant memory and the remaining pulp and paper mills have cleaned up their effluents, but we find that with the decline in the timber and paper industries the state has not yet found adequate economic and cultural replacements.

Among the lower 48 states Maine has the largest percentage of land area in forest cover, and much of this fills the riparian zones adjacent to our many lakes and rivers. As a consequence Maine does not face the non-point-source agricultural pollution risks seen

in watersheds in other states (for example, the rivers feeding the Chesapeake). Of all our many large rivers, the Penobscot, draining the largest watershed, stands as a beacon for both the state and the Nation. If we are unable to return this river to a productive migratory fish waterway, the other rivers in our Nation stand little chance of recovery.

The Atlantic salmon may be the ‘spotted owl’ of the Penobscot, but it is just one of many important migratory fish that depend on this waterway, including two species of sturgeon, shad, alewives, blueback herring, eels and striped bass. Getting sustainable runs of these and other diadromous fish requires long-view sustainable management by state fisheries agencies and opening of access to spawning and rearing habitat. The state plan for the restoration of the sea-run fisheries not only provides ecological benefits for these fish and their wildlife dependents, but it lays the groundwork for regional economic, cultural and recreational opportunities. Already we are seeing signs of a resurgence of river related activity with increases in recreational boating, more cruise ship dockings and, perhaps most notably, the success of the American Folk Festival, held on the banks of the river each August – drawing upwards of 150,000 fans. It is the sum of all these benefits that has helped to create the unique coalition made up of the Atlantic Salmon Federation, American Rivers, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Trout Unlimited, Maine Audubon, the Penobscot Nation, the State of Maine, the U.S. Department of Interior and PPL Corporation (owner of the main stem hydropower dams). Even more of a surprise, this group with widely disparate views has crafted an agreement with the common goal to restore the Penobscot.

Big changes happen when the small efforts of many coalesce toward a common goal. We are seeing this happen with the Penobscot River restoration. I will conclude by mentioning one of these small efforts. In 1999 Steve Campbell of Brewer fulfilled a long held dream and purchased the once world famous but long dormant Thomas Rod Co. He is now building bamboo fly rods that rival the salmon rods built by Fred E. Thomas a century and more ago. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could bring the river back to conditions that would support a vibrant, recreational, catch and release salmon fishery where we might again see the bobbing Bangor Pool peapods (also being built or restored again) and the arcing of bamboo salmon rods, rather than having our children know about these scenes only as historical black and white photographs or reminisces of old men.

