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SALMON SEASON

While salmon fishermen are enjoying their return to the Penobscot River for the first time in seven years, a cloud hangs over the fishery. A review of the fish's status concluded that large rivers — the Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin — should be added to the endangered species listing that now covers eight smaller rivers in eastern and midcoast Maine.

The recommendation that the listing be expanded is not a surprise. Given the many ongoing efforts, most involving federal agencies, to improve Maine rivers for salmon, more regulation isn't necessary.

First the good news. As touted on the front page of *The New York Times* Thursday, salmon fishing is currently allowed on the Penobscot River for the first time since 1999, when fishing was stopped as federal officials considered adding wild Atlantic salmon to the endangered species list. Salmon in the Dennys, East Machias, Machias, Pleasant and Narraguagus rivers in Washington County, the Ducktrap River in Waldo County and Sheepscot River in Lincoln County and Cove Brook, a Penobscot tributary south of Bangor, were declared an endangered species in 2000.

After consulting with state and federal biologists, the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission allowed a brief, restricted fall salmon season on the Penobscot. The one-month season began on Sept. 15 and more than 200 licenses have been sold. Beau Peavey, a 22-year-old from Glenburn who's been fishing since he was 4, caught the first salmon of this short season on Wednesday.

The Penobscot, which has been stocked with millions of non-native

fish over the last century, was not included among the eight rivers that the federal government said were home to endangered salmon populations, but there was fear that federal agencies would later add it to the list.

That fear eased when the federal government praised a massive project for restoring the Penobscot and its fish population. The Penobscot River Restoration Trust is seeking \$50 million to buy and remove two dams. Modifications at five other dams on the river will reopen 500 miles of habitat for salmon and other fish.

The project is supported by state and federal agencies, environmental groups, the Penobscot Nation and salmon enthusiasts. The energy company that owns the dams has already begun modification work. Bangor Daily News Publisher Richard J. Warren is the chair of the trust's capital campaign.

This week, a group of biologists recommended to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that the endangered species designation be expanded to include the Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers and all the salmon held in hatcheries as part of the recovery effort because these fish are basically the same as those in the listed rivers.

In their report, the biologists identify dams as the biggest problem for salmon. Since there is a cooperative effort under way to remove numerous dams on the Penobscot, this problem is already being addressed in the river with the largest salmon population.

A large federal financial contribution to the Penobscot Restoration Project will do more to help salmon than adding the three big rivers to the endangered species listing.