

# The New York Times

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*Founded in 1851*

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## Undamming the Penobscot

In many ways, taking a dam down is harder than putting one up, especially dams as old as some of the ones on Maine's Penobscot River and its tributaries. The hydropower they generate has to be replaced, as does the income they generate. Communities that have grown up knowing the river one way have to learn to know the river a different way — without a dam.

That is one of the reasons why last week's announcement by the Penobscot River Restoration Trust is so remarkable. Using a combination of private and public money, the group will buy three venerable dams on the Penobscot drainage from the PPL Corporation, an energy company. The Veazie and Great Works dams will be demolished, and a new fish bypass will be constructed at the Howland dam.

There have been dams of one sort or another at these three locations for a very long time — since 1800 at the Veazie site, since the late 19th century at the Great Works site, and since 1916 at the Howland site. When this project is complete — sometime in 2012-13 — it will open up a thousand miles of river to spawning fish.

It is always tempting to say that these waters are being restored for the return of Atlantic salmon, as indeed they are. But this project also means reopening an entire ecosystem. When the dams come down, the Penobscot system will also see increased runs of American shad, blueback herring, alewife, American eel, sea lamprey, Atlantic sturgeon, endangered shortnose sturgeon, striped bass, tomcod and rainbow smelt — an aquatic tide of life beginning to surge upstream again.