

Condition focus of Penobscot River event

BY DAWN GAGNON
OF THE NEWS STAFF

BANGOR — In the not so distant past, the Penobscot River was so polluted that few dared to fish or swim in it.

Few of the communities that flank it valued the river, as evidenced by the once derelict waterfront districts. Effluent from mills and factories and sewage systems was discharged into the river, often with little or no treatment.

The river looked bad — and smelled worse.

Though there's still some room for improvement, the Penobscot has come a long way, in large part because of such environmental pioneers as Maine's own U.S. Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, author of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, both enacted by Congress in the early 1970s.

Known formally as the Federal Water Pollution Control

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DAVE EDWARDS OF THE PENOBSCOT RIVER AND BAY INSTITUTE

Act, it is the key federal law that protects the nation's lakes, rivers, aquifers and coastal regions.

In addition, riverside communities and many industries have made significant investments in water quality improvement projects, watershed management efforts and other means for restoring the health and vitality of the Penobscot River.

The river's improving condition was the focus of Penobscot River Revival, a festival-like event that drew hundreds of people to the Bangor Waterfront under picture-perfect

blue skies Saturday. Some people came to celebrate the river's revival; others were lured by activities for children and the live music.

The celebration involved more than 30 exhibitors, ranging from educational programs and sportsmen's groups to land trusts, water quality and wildlife organizations.

Arts and logging history and local businesses also were represented, including Lane Construction, which staffed an exhibit showing how permeable pavement can prevent road runoff contaminated with fuel, salt and heavy metals from

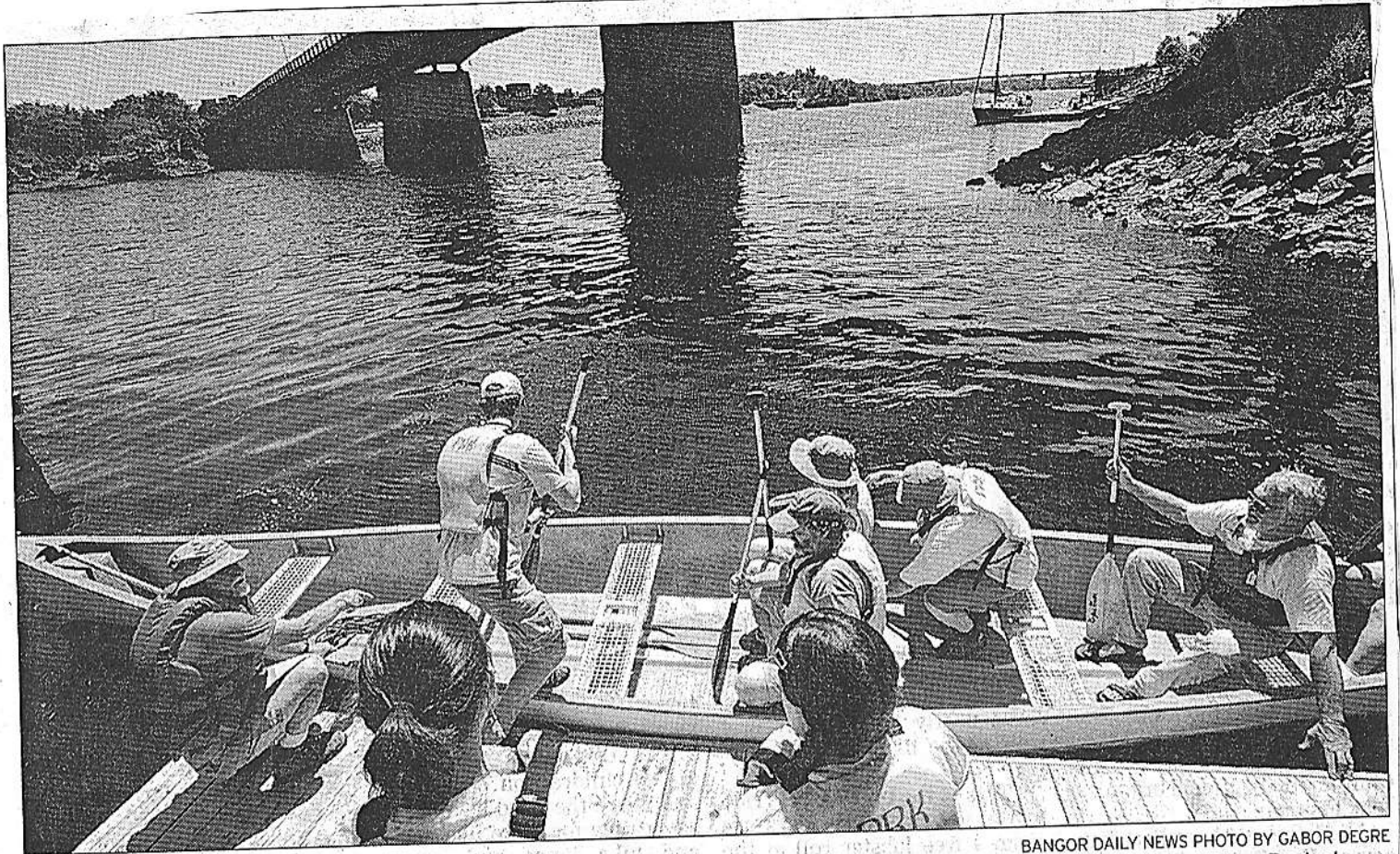
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reaching the region's water bodies.

Dave Edwards of the Penobscot River and Bay Institute, housed at the University of Maine's Sen. George J. Mitchell Center, is among those who credit the river's turnaround to public education, a better understanding of human activity's impact on the environment, and investments in projects that have improved water quality and watershed management made over the last 30 to 40 years.

"Aren't we leading the way here with the river restoration efforts?" Edwards asked, as he surveyed views of the now cleaner river from Bangor Waterfront.

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY GABOR DEGRE

People get into a war canoe for a ride on the Penobscot River in Bangor on Saturday afternoon during the Penobscot River Revival festival. Several conservation groups organized the event that featured arts and crafts, boating safety tips, exhibits and live music.

River

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The Lower Penobscot Watershed Coalition and the Penobscot River Restoration Trust were among the lead organizers of the event, which also aimed to raise awareness about migratory fish and the many area efforts to restore the health of the Penobscot River,

noted Gayle Zydlewski of the Lower Penobscot Watershed Coalition.

"This is a nice turnout," said Don Foster of Holden, who belongs to the Penobscot Salmon Club and other angler groups.

"What these [organizations] are doing is great because it tells the story of the river," he said.

"This river is part of the heritage of the Bangor area and

over time, it will be part of our economic future — I really believe that, I really do," Foster said, pointing out Cianbro Corp.'s module production facility on the Brewer side of the river as one case in point.

Bangor Land Trust President Lucy Quimby said the celebration provided opportunities to cultivate partnerships between land and water conservation groups.

"The issues are really two

parts of the same thing," Quimby noted.

Among the people Quimby encountered were a family interested in relocating to the area. They stopped by the revival bash to check things out.

"I think it really is an opportunity for the region to strut its stuff," said Quimby.

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