

# Penobscot River restoration groups near funding goal

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Both chambers of Congress have approved budgets that contain \$10 million to help purchase three Penobscot River dams that eventually will be removed or bypassed to restore fish habitat in Maine's largest watershed.

Project backers caution that several more hurdles need to be cleared before the federal money is in hand. The House and Senate still need to iron out the other differences in their respective budget bills, which then must be approved by President Bush.

But project leaders said they are optimistic that the money will come through because the

president had included \$10 million in his budget for the project.

"It's a great show of support," said Laura Rose Day, executive director of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust.

The \$10 million would bring the trust within reach of meeting the organization's \$25 million obligation to purchase the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams from PPL Corp.

The trust, which is a coalition of conservation groups

and the Penobscot Nation, then will have to raise another \$25 million to remove the Veazie and Great Works dams and to build a state-of-the-art fish bypass around the Howland dam.

Once complete, the project would improve access to nearly 1,000 miles of habitat for such species of sea-run fish as Atlantic salmon, shortnose sturgeon and alewives.

The project already has received more than \$5 million in federal money. Day and other

project leaders said they hope to complete their \$10 million private fundraising campaign within several weeks. That means the additional \$10 million in federal money, if passed by Congress and signed by the president, likely would allow the trust to meet its fundraising goal.

"We should be in a position to very soon move forward with the purchase of the dams, probably sometime in 2008," said Andrew Goode, vice president of U.S. programs for the

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SENS. SUSAN COLLINS AND OLYMPIA SNOWE, IN A JOINT STATEMENT

Atlantic Salmon Federation, who works on the public funding portion of the project for the trust.

"We are extremely pleased that the scale of private funding and this federal investment will allow the Penobscot Trust to move forward with the first phase of the project," Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe, both Maine Republicans, said in a joint statement last week after the Senate passed the budget bill containing the \$10 million.

"The restoration will provide dividends to generations of Mainers and we are thrilled that the Senate has provided this critical funding," the senators said.

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## River

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Signed in June 2004, the river restoration project has been hailed as a model for "cooperative conservation." PPL agreed to sell the three dams to the coalition in exchange for the right to increase power generation at the company's dams in Med-

way, Ellsworth (Graham Lake), West Enfield, Stillwater, Orono and Milford. The participating groups also agreed not to oppose future relicensing at the dams.

In addition to raising an additional \$25 million for the project's second phase, the trust will have to complete detailed technical studies as well as obtain numerous permits and other authorizations before removing the dams.