

Breaching of Veazie Dam Dam slated for July 22

BY DAWN GAGNON
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VEAZIE — Mainers will have an opportunity to see some history in the making in July, when the effort to remove the Veazie Dam — one of the few remaining impediments to the return of native sea-run fish to the Penobscot River — gets underway with its initial breaching.

That event has been set for July 22, according to Laura Rose Day, executive director of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, a nonprofit organization formed to bring the river reopening to its fruition.

The landmark river restoration project is a joint effort of the Penobscot Indian Nation, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, six other nongovernmental organizations, the state of Maine, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and hydropower companies.

Supporters of the river restoration project say that removing the century-old Veazie Dam, which spans the river from Veazie to Eddington, will help restore about 225 acres of in-stream habitat and about 65 acres of streamside habitat, while enhancing the connectiv-

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Dam

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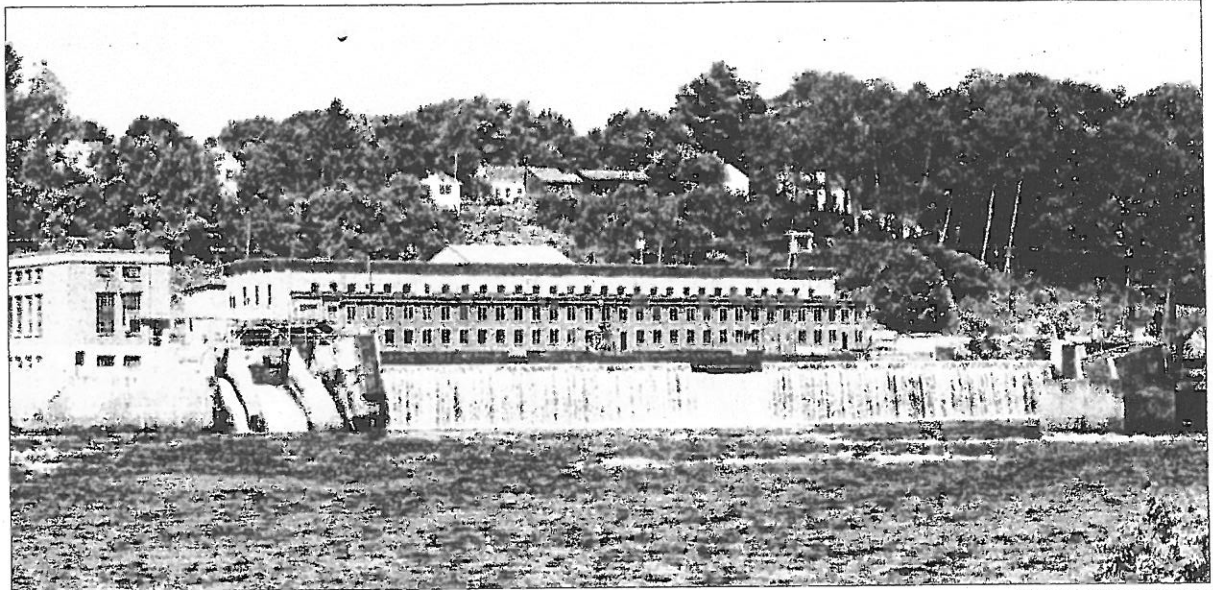
ity and functional value of 138,000 acres of wetland habitats for native sea-run fish, including endangered Atlantic salmon, endangered shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon and eight other fish species.

The Great Works Dam removal in Bradley was the first to go as part of the project.

Once the Veazie Dam, the lowermost barrier on the Penobscot River, is removed and a dam in Howland is bypassed, sea-run fisheries will gain access to more than 1,000 miles of upstream habitat that has been closed to their predecessors for more than a century, according to Rose Day. Sargent Corp. of Stillwater has been chosen to take on the Veazie Dam removal, which could last into next summer.

"The Penobscot project is really known for the long-lasting partnerships that make it happen," she said. Those partnerships and their accomplishments to date will be celebrated on July 22.

"This is a day to bring people together to kind of kick off what will be a decades-long process of restoring the river," she said in a telephone interview Sunday. "We'll see some changes really quickly and we'll see some changes over time, but really everyone and all of the fish and wildlife in the region stand to gain. It's a time for everyone to get together and mark that historical moment together."



The Veazie Dam in 2010.

Rose Day said that the day's lineup is still being firmed up but will begin with a ceremony and news conference around 10 a.m. at Riverview Park, near the Veazie Salmon Club. A community barbecue will follow.

In the afternoon, she said, the public will have opportunities to visit half a dozen or more sites important to the project, including the former

Great Works dam site, where the Penobscot now flows freely, a new fishway up at the Maine Forest and Logging Museum at Leonard's Mills in Bradley and the fishway at Blackman Stream, a tributary to the Penobscot.

A docent will be on hand at each site to provide information, Rose Day said.

After the site visits, participants — including those who

have to work during the day-time — are invited to return to Riverview Park for music, children's activities, food and more.

"We're also having a storytelling opportunity for people who want to come and talk about their history with the river," Rose Day said.

"It might be the tradition of salmon fishing that they'd like to have back someday or

it might be that they worked at the Veazie hydro station," she said. "We're basically having a time where people can talk about their connections to the river there, so that will be pretty exciting."

"It's a chance to bring older and younger generations together ... people from different walks of life who might not get together to talk about the river and what it can be in

the future. We'll create a forum for everyone to talk to each other and listen to each other," she said.

Additional details about the July event will be forthcoming, she said.

For more information about the Veazie Dam celebration, contact Penobscot River Restoration Project Outreach Coordinator Cheryl Daigle at 232-9969.

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