

State

Bomb threat
Note found at Penobscot
Narrows Bridge Observatory
forces evacuation **B6**

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Section B

Dam removal plan ready for feedback

BY KEVIN MILLER
OF THE NEWS STAFF

BDN
8:24:09

*FERC says Penobscot River restoration project's benefits
would outweigh any negative environmental effects*

AUGUSTA — Federal regulators are recommending only minor changes to a proposal to remove two Penobscot River dams and bypass a third as part of a historic plan to restore fish habitat throughout the watershed.

In a draft environmental assessment released this month, staff at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission determined that the river restoration project would benefit native plants and animals as well as increase recreational opportunities on the lower Penobscot.

FERC staff with the Office of Energy Projects acknowledged that the proposed

removal of the Veazie and Great Works dams has the potential to affect some protected species as well as historic cultural sites. But they said those effects should be minimized by the numerous agreements included in the Penobscot River Restoration Trust's proposal and required consultations.

FERC is seeking public comment on the draft assessment through Sept. 3.

"Based on our evaluation of the environmental effects and public benefits of

the Trust's proposal, we conclude that approving the surrender of the Veazie, Great Works, and Howland [dams] ... would be in the public interest," FERC staff wrote in the draft environmental assessment.

Under the terms of a 2003 agreement, the power company PPL Corp. offered to sell the three dams for \$25 million to the coalition of groups comprising the Penobscot River Restoration Trust. In turn, PPL was allowed to increase power

generation at six other dams within its ownership. Federal officials have hailed the proposal as one of the most significant river restoration projects in the nation's history.

With money in hand, the trust is seeking the federal approvals necessary to take ownership of the dams.

The plan calls for removing the Veazie and Great Works dams and building a state-of-the-art fish bypass around the Howland dam. All told, the changes are expected to reopen nearly 1,000 miles of riverine habitat to endangered Atlantic salmon, shad, alewives, eels and other species of sea-run fish.

FERC staff have recommended *rela-*
See River; Page B5

Bangor Daily News, Monday, August 24, 2009, From B1 B5

River

Continued from Page B1

tively minor changes to the proposal. Those modifications include:

- Development of erosion and sedimentation control plans before work on the dams.

- Implementation of a memorandum of understanding between the trust, the Penobscot Indian Nation (a trust member) and other partners addressing possible effects to historic sites.

- Monitor for and clear any obstructions to fish passage into tributaries after the water level has dropped after the dams' removals.

- Submit an invasive species monitoring and control plan to prevent invasive plants from out-competing native plants at the sites of the former impoundments.

FERC staff noted the concerns raised by some sportsmen that the proposed Howland bypass could allow upstream access to northern pike, a large fish with a voracious appetite introduced illegally into Maine waters.

The sportsmen fear that pike could harm the prized brook trout fisheries in the Piscataquis River, the East Branch of the Pleasant River and even potentially the West Branch of the Penobscot.

Pike already are present in Pushaw Lake outside Bangor and, it is feared, may be establishing themselves in the Penobscot.

But FERC pointed out the state has filed a plan to continue monitoring for pike and taking steps to halt their migration. Proposals include maintaining current blockages in some locations in the headwaters and creating velocity or jump barriers at Guilford. And the report stated that a proposed "trap and sort" system at the Howland dam would in all likelihood

not be feasible and would negate the intention of a quasi-natural bypass.

The draft assessment also pointed the finger back at fishermen.

"The presence of multiple dams in the Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Sebasticook watersheds has not prevented introduction of pike into headwaters in those watersheds, suggesting that humans have likely introduced northern pike above these dams," the report reads.

Overall, FERC staff wrote that the proposed removal of the Veazie and Great Works dams "will benefit greatly" sea-run fish. The proposed fish passage upgrades at the Milford dam and the new bypass at the Howland dam "will allow these species to access their entire historic habitat in the Penobscot watershed."

Jeff Reardon with Trout Unlimited, which is one of the partner organizations in the

trust, said he and other parties to the agreement were pleased that FERC largely endorsed the plan. The recommended modifications were also consistent with FERC recommendations on two other dam removal projects in Maine: the Edwards Dam on the Kennebec River and the Fort Halifax dam on the Sebasticook River.

"It's largely what we were expecting," said Reardon, who is helping lead the effort to acquire the necessary permits. "The good news is we were not going through this for the first time."

Reardon encouraged anyone with comments on the draft assessment to submit them to FERC. The trust must also receive permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection before beginning work on the dams.

The partner organizations in the river restoration project are:

American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Penobscot Indian Nation, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Park Service, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the State Planning Office and PPL.

Written comments on the draft environmental assessment should be sent by Sept. 3 to Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First St., N.E., Room 1-A, Washington, D.C. 20426.

Comments also may be filed online by going to www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/efiling.asp.

All comments must include the project number (P-2232).

kmiller@bangordailynews.net
623-0024