

BDN
4.26/27

Interior lauds restoration work for sea-run fish

BY KEVIN MILLER
OF THE NEWS STAFF

The coalition working to restore passage for Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish species in the Penobscot River received national recognition this week.

The U.S. Department of the Interior awarded one of 21 "cooperative conservation" awards to the groups behind the historic pact to remove two dams and bypass a third on the Penobscot. The historic agreement, made final in 2004, involves six conservation groups, the Penobscot Nation, dam owner PPL Corp. and several state and federal agencies.

The Interior Department award called the Penobscot project "one of the most ecologically significant and innovative river restoration efforts in the nation" and "the last best chance to save wild Atlantic salmon from extinction in the United States."

Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne presented the award during a ceremony in Washington, D.C., earlier this week. In total, the 21 awards recognized more than 700 groups or individuals across the country as working cooperatively on a broad range of conservation projects.

Under the terms of the Penobscot agreement, the coalition known as the Penobscot River Restoration Trust plans to purchase the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams from power company PPL Corp. In return, PPL is permitted to increase power generation at six other dams to offset the losses at the three.

The project is expected to open up nearly 1,000 miles of

habitat to Atlantic salmon, alewives, Atlantic and short-nose sturgeon and other sea-run fish now blocked from migrating upstream. The Penobscot is home to the nation's last remaining sizable run of wild Atlantic salmon.

The trust has raised approximately \$25 million from private and federal sources to purchase

Effort to remove, bypass dams praised

the dams. After the purchases are complete, likely later this year, the coalition must raise an additional \$25 million to remove the Veazie and Great Works dams and bypass the Howland dam.

"The Penobscot Indian Nation, whose ties to the river go back more than 10,000 years, is deeply appreciative of this award, and the Department of Interior's recognition that the project is not just about removing dams and restoring fish, but also about our cultural survival," Chief Kirk Francis said in a statement. "This project really shows what we can achieve by working collaboratively to protect the environment, renew our cultural traditions, and provide for local economies."

The other groups involved in the Penobscot River Restoration Trust are the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Natural Resources Council of Maine and American Rivers.

kmliller@bangordailynews.net
990-8250