

NEWS RELEASE

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Penobscot River Restoration Project Celebrates First Anniversary of Connecting 2000 miles of River to the Sea *Collaborative effort to rebalance fisheries and hydropower on Maine's largest river completed one year ago*

One year ago, on Tuesday, June 14, 2016, hundreds of people, including federal, state, local, and tribal officials, and project partners, gathered in Howland, Maine, to mark and celebrate the completion of the last major milestone in the [Penobscot River Restoration Project](#), widely considered one of the largest, most innovative river restoration projects in the nation.

For the first time in more than a century American shad, river herring, and Atlantic salmon could swim freely around the Howland dam to and from important historic spawning and rearing habitat, thanks to the completion of [the large, stream-like fish "bypass" channel](#) around the dam. The bypass reconnected the Piscataquis River to the main stem of the Penobscot and the Gulf of Maine, allowing sea-run fish to swim freely past the dam for the first time in almost 200 years.

The completion fulfilled [the Penobscot Project's goal](#) of significantly improving access to 2,000 miles of Maine's largest river for eleven species of native sea-run fish, while maintaining energy through increased hydropower generation at other dams in the watershed.

The project is already showing success. More than two million river herring are expected to surge past the former Veazie dam site this year, and in just the past few weeks more than 225 Atlantic salmon have also entered the river. In 2016, the river herring count (alewife and blueback herring) totaled 1.8 million, and more than 7,000 American shad were counted upriver as well.

Sea-run fish are rapidly recolonizing places they haven't been able to reach since the 1800s. River herring, shad, eels, and Atlantic salmon have been sighted more than 90 miles above the former Veazie dam at the Mattaceunk dam in Medway and also into the upper reaches of the Mattawamkeag River. Sturgeon are reclaiming their historic habitats upriver as well.

"It is thrilling to see the river rebounding since the Penobscot Project reconnected the Gulf of Maine to more than 2,000 miles of upstream waters," says **Don Hudson, Chairman of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust**. "The fish know just what to do, and the eagles, otters, wildlife watchers, boaters, and fishermen do, too."

Five years ago, in June 2012, the Great Works dam removal began, followed by the removal of the Veazie dam at the head of tide in 2013. At the same time, dam owners built a fish elevator at the Milford dam, now the only dam on the lower Penobscot. Dam owners increased power generation at

several other locations within the Penobscot watershed to maintain and even increase power generation in the river.

The restored river provides many cultural, economic, and recreational opportunities from the Penobscot headwaters to the Gulf of Maine. As a result of the project, the river now better supports Penobscot Indian Nation tribal culture, renews traditional uses, and provides broad benefits to fish and wildlife along the river corridor and into the Gulf of Maine. The project has also resulted in increased business and regulatory certainty for the dam owners.

“It's exciting to see such great fish returns so soon after the dams were removed,” says **Kirk Francis, Chief of the Penobscot Nation**. “Restoring the ecological integrity of our homeland, the Penobscot Watershed, has been by far the most important project that our tribe has been involved with.”

New community activities abound. Last year, hundreds of paddlers— from teens to elders, hailing from Old Town to Alaska—raced through newly free-flowing rapids in the national whitewater races hosted by the Penobscot Nation. Riverside communities and businesses supported them. This year, June 28-July 4, the Penobscot River Whitewater Nationals Regatta, will be celebrated for the third time on the historically important and beautiful 9.5-mile section of river between Old Town and Eddington. Holding this event on the river would not have been possible before the PRRP's activities. In the past two years the race has attracted participants from 15 states and four countries.

Last month, for the third year in a row, the Maine Forest and Logging Museum held “Spring Runs Day,” celebrating the return of alewives to Blackman Stream. The event featured an up-close look at the alewife run and tastings of alewives smoked in a traditional smokehouse on site, as well as a cross country race, and shingle making and saw cutting demonstration. The fishway, constructed by the Atlantic Salmon Federation in 2010, is one of the few places on the Penobscot where residents can see tens of thousands of river herring swimming upstream to spawn. The river herring count in the stream has skyrocketed from zero in 2012 to more than 590,000 so far this spring. In May more than 300 excited school children visited the fishway to see the mass migration of fish.

“By decommissioning the Veazie, Great Works, and Howland dams, the survival rates for Atlantic salmon heading upstream and downstream has significantly improved, giving real hope their numbers will begin to increase in the coming years,” says **Andrew Goode of the Atlantic Salmon Federation**.

“Trout Unlimited is pleased to see the Howland Bypass in action with fish moving into upstream habitat,” says **Jeff Reardon of Trout Unlimited**. “We look forward to seeing continued benefits in Howland and the rest of the Piscataquis valley.”

“NRCM is proud to be a founding partner in this massive collaborative effort to restore the Penobscot River fisheries,” says **Lisa Pohlmann, Executive Director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine**. “Thanks to our members, our partners in the Project, and countless people throughout Maine and beyond, life in the watershed is on the rebound and we are seeing the fruits of our labors, as people and wildlife are energized by the renewed river.”

The Penobscot Project demonstrates how diverse interests can work together to develop results-based approaches to fisheries restoration and hydropower basin-wide. This type of approach could serve as a model for other efforts around the world. [Dam owners, conservation groups, tribal, state, and federal agencies, and citizens worked together for 16 years](#) to accomplish the Penobscot River Restoration

Project, which better balances restoration of native sea-run fish with hydropower generation. The Penobscot Project was funded through a combination of federal and private sources.

The Penobscot River Restoration Trust is a nonprofit organization responsible for completing the core elements of the Penobscot Project. Members are the Penobscot Indian Nation, American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Trout Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy. Other major partners include the State of Maine (Department of Marine Resources, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife), Department of the Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs), PPL Corporation, and Black Bear Hydro Partners LLC.

Timeline:

2004: The Penobscot Indian Nation, several conservation groups, the dam owner, and state and federal agencies sign the Penobscot River Settlement Accord, paving the way to the enactment of the restoration project.

2010: Penobscot River Restoration Trust purchases the three dams.

2012: Great Works dam removed.

2013-14: Veazie dam removed.

2015: Howland fish bypass construction begins.

2016: Howland fish bypass completed. Vastly-improved connection between the Gulf of Maine and 2,000 miles of upstream habitat for sea-run fish.