

# River trust <sup>BDN</sup> to buy dams <sup>8-22-08</sup> on Penobscot

## Three sites key to group's fish conservation plan

BY KEVIN MILLER  
OF THE NEWS STAFF

OLD TOWN — Armed with \$25 million in public and private funding, a coalition is pushing ahead with plans to purchase three dams in the Penobscot River as part of an unprecedented project to reopen spawning grounds for Atlantic salmon and other fish species.

Five years ago, conservationists, tribal and government officials, and representatives of the power industry announced an ambitious plan to remove two dams and bypass a third dam without reducing hydroelectric generation in the Penobscot.

But first, the newly formed coalition would have to raise \$25 million.

On Thursday, many of those same individuals gathered again on the banks of the Penobscot in Old Town to announce they had begun the process of transferring ownership of the Veazie, Great Works and Howland dams.

"We have come a long way, and that is a large, collective 'we,'" Laura Rose Day, executive direc-

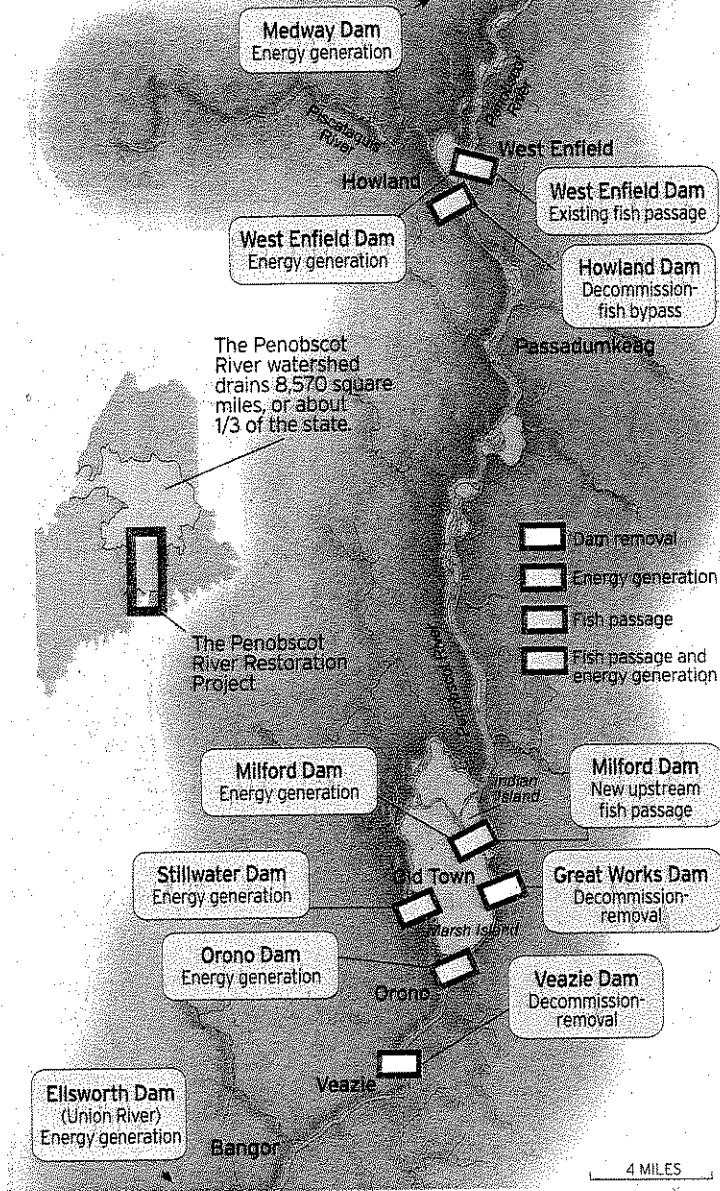
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## The Penobscot River Restoration Project

The Penobscot River Restoration Project will significantly improve access to nearly 1,000 miles of historic river habitat for Atlantic salmon and other "upper river" species of native sea-run fish.



# River

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tor of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, told the enthusiastic crowd of partners and supporters.

"People didn't think you could do it," added Gov. John Baldacci, "and you've shown them you can."

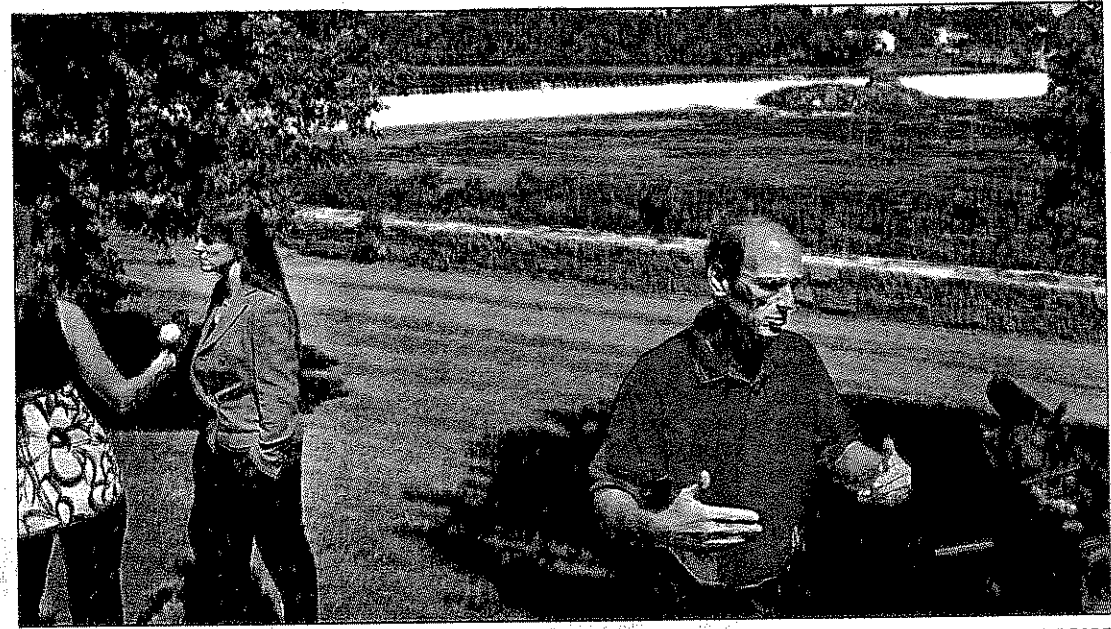
The Penobscot River Restoration Trust is now roughly halfway toward its goal of removing the Veazie and Great Works dams as well as decommissioning and bypassing the Howland dam. The trust now must raise another \$25 million to \$30 million to remove and bypass the dams.

The Penobscot project has been hailed as a national model of "cooperative conservation" because of the diversity of the parties involved. The list of partners includes six conservation groups, the Penobscot Nation, seven state and federal agencies, and dam owner PPL Corp.

What makes the 2003 agreement so remarkable is that, just years earlier, many of those same groups had been battling one another over issues of fish passage, habitat restoration and power generation.

The plan would reopen nearly 1,000 miles of habitat in the Penobscot watershed for Atlantic salmon, American shad, river herring and other sea-run fish. A resurgence of those species, in turn, is expected to help restore wider ecological balance by providing forage fish for eagles, cod and other predators.

Pennsylvania-based PPL Corp. is allowed to offset the losses of the three dams by increasing power generation at six others.



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY GABOR DEGRE

Gov. John Baldacci (right) and Penobscot River Restoration Trust executive director Laura Rose Day give interviews after a press conference at Waterfront Park in Old Town. The trust announced that it was able to raise \$25 million to buy three dams along the Penobscot River, which will be removed when the group can raise another \$25 million to \$30 million. In the background is Milford dam, which is not one that will be removed.

For instance, the company is recommissioning the now-defunct dam just below downtown Orono.

PPL also has pledged to improve fish passage at four of the dams. The Milford Dam, which served as the backdrop for Thursday's events, will be retrofitted with a new fish elevator.

Penobscot Nation Chief Kirk Francis said the river has served as his tribe's highway, life source and center of cultural practices for thousands of years. So this project, for tribal members, is about much more than simply removing a few dams, Francis said.

"The Penobscot River restoration project should be looked at as the model and the beacon for how

people should come together," Francis said.

Others echoed those words.

William Brennan, deputy administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and an assistant secretary of commerce in the Bush administration, called the project one of the most important opportunities to recover populations of wild Atlantic salmon in the U.S.

The trust received \$15 million from federal sources and \$10 million in private donations for acquisition of the three dams. The coalition now is developing engineering plans to remove or bypass the dams.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the U.S. Army Corps

of Engineers and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection must approve the transfer of the dams. Representatives said Thursday they hope to complete the permitting process within a year.

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.