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Riverside growth bond proposed

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Maine communities hoping to convert an old, riverside mill into posh apartments or turn a waterfront industrial site into a park could get a financial boost from a bond proposal pending before the state Legislature.

Several lawmakers are seeking their colleagues' approval for a \$25 million Riverside Community Development bond that would help towns pay for revitalization projects along Maine's 30,000 miles of rivers.

Supporters of the bond proposal, including a slew of conservation groups, said Tuesday that riverside revitalization projects can help boost tourism and business activity in an area. They cited projects from Old Town to Brunswick as proof of the economic benefit of riverfront improvement.

"Many Maine communities are beginning to focus on rivers as an opportunity to attract business and improve the quality of life for their residents," John Rohman of WBRC Architects and Engineers of Bangor said in a statement. Rohman is also chairman of the Maine Arts Commission.

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Rohman

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"With a little boost from the state, towns and cities can find ways to leverage private and federal funds aimed at river restoration, and this bond will do just that," said Rohman.

Rivers have always played a central role in Maine communities and the economy. More than half of all state residents live in riverfront communities. But after several centuries of abuse and neglect, Maine's rivers are re-emerging as key to a growing economic industry in Maine: tourism and, more specifically, ecotourism.

D'arcy Main-Boyington, eco-

nomic development director for the city of Brewer, said she sees enormous potential for the bond. Brewer is planning a major redevelopment of the former Eastern Fine Paper Co. mill, including town houses and a marina.

The city also is beginning preliminary work on the first stage of a trail along the Penobscot River. Even if the bonds are not available for Brewer's trail project, they could go to neighboring towns that could develop their own trail system to connect with Brewer's, Main-Boyington said.

Anything that sparks more tourism activity in the area will also be good for Brewer, she said.

"I see this money as being land-

important for the entire region, but it could be especially important to some of the smaller communities," Main-Boyington said.

The bond bill is being sponsored by Sen. Peggy Rotundo, a Lewiston Democrat who co-chairs the appropriations committee. Rotundo's committee will be responsible for reviewing the \$25 million bond bill as well as dozens of other bond bills seeking money for everything from stem cell research to development of biofuels.

Rotundo's co-sponsors on the bill are Republican Sen. Peter Mills of Skowhegan and Democratic Reps. Theodore Koffman of Bar Harbor, Thomas Watson of Bath and Jill Conover of Oak-