

Penobscot River Restoration Trust

PRESS RELEASE

Reconnecting the Penobscot River with the Sea: Breaching Veazie Dam on Maine's Penobscot River

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Eddington and Veazie, Maine – Today, a local contractor (Sargent Corporation, Old Town) will begin to remove the Veazie Dam, re-opening the Penobscot River from Old Town, Maine to the sea for the first time in nearly 200 years. The removal of the 830-foot long, 30 foot high buttress-style Veazie Dam, built in 1913, is a monumental step in the Penobscot River Restoration Project, among the largest river restoration efforts in the nation's history. Just last week, another local contractor (R.F. Jordan & Sons Construction, Inc., Ellsworth) completed advance demolition work on the facility's smaller "Plant-B" powerhouse to prepare for the removal of the main dam.

With Veazie's removal, endangered shortnose sturgeon, threatened Atlantic sturgeon, striped bass, tomcod and rainbow smelt will have open access to 100% of their historic habitat in Maine's largest river and second largest in the Northeast. Combined with the Great Works Dam removal in 2012 and fish passage improvements to be completed at Milford and Howland dams, the Veazie Dam removal is a key component of the historic effort to greatly improve access to 1000 miles of habitat for endangered Atlantic salmon, American shad, alewife, and eight other species of sea-run fish.

For more than a decade, the Penobscot Indian Nation, seven conservation groups, hydropower companies, and state and federal agencies, have worked together -- with broad community input -- to implement an unprecedented plan to restore sea-run fisheries while maintaining hydropower generation.

Project partner Black Bear Hydro Partners, LLC, is completing projects to increase energy generation at six dams including the Stillwater and Orono dams that will maintain and likely increase hydropower generation supported by the Penobscot Project partners. Once Veazie Dam is removed, Milford Dam will become the lowermost dam on the river. Black Bear is constructing a fish lift at Milford and making additional fish passage improvements at dams elsewhere in the watershed.

"Black Bear is excited to develop new hydropower in the Penobscot watershed as part of the Penobscot Project's new balance between energy production and fisheries. We look forward to continuing our work with the Penobscot River Restoration Trust and other project partners to realize both energy and fisheries benefits for Maine," said Scott Hall, Vice President, Environmental & Business Services, Black Bear Hydro Partners, LLC.

The Penobscot Project's innovative public-private partnership is recognized internationally for its potential to restore vital habitat for fish and wildlife, expand opportunities for outdoor recreation, and support energy production in a large ecosystem. In 2012, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated the Penobscot River as one of America's Great Outdoors Rivers.

"For the first time in 150 years, the Atlantic salmon run will naturally reach the Penobscot Indian Nation's ancient fishing grounds on the river that bears their name. When Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, river herring, American eels, and other migratory fish reach Veazie, they will once again freely swim upstream. We are pleased to provide support for such a monumental and far-reaching endeavor," said Wendi Weber, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region Director. "The combined effort of many partners has led to success on the Penobscot and the Project has been hailed as a model for river restoration. Together, we have taken great strides to ensure that the river will provide enduring benefits for the people of Maine and the Penobscot Indian Nation."

For millennia, the Penobscot River flowed unobstructed into the Gulf of Maine, supporting a bountiful landscape that sustained the first people of the region, the Penobscot people, and then later the communities that grew from

European settlement. In the early 1800's the construction of multiple dams on the lower river had an immediate and harmful impact on fisheries and transportation routes. Dams at this site have blocked sea-run fish from reaching their spawning, rearing, and nursery habitat, leading to the sharp decline of once thriving fisheries that were central to the economies and culture of river and coastal communities.

“We are thrilled to be part of this ongoing collaborative effort to restore the Penobscot watershed ecosystem,” said John Bullard, Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries. “We expect to see some real benefits to the 11 sea-run fish species that inhabit these waters, notably vulnerable Atlantic sturgeon and shortnose sturgeon, which now will have access to 100 percent of their historic habitat. By providing fish with the right places to breed, grow, and survive to adulthood, we can have a stronger regional ecosystem with increased opportunities for recreational fishing and a bigger commercial harvest.”

“The Veazie Dam removal is a major step forward in the restoration of Maine's native sea-run fisheries, which are vital to the biodiversity of marine and freshwater habitats in our state. At the same time it balances the need for hydropower within the watershed,” said Patrick Keliher, Commissioner, Maine Department of Marine Resources. “This project will help re-establish a long-lost yet critically important ecosystem while maintaining opportunity for renewable power generation on the Penobscot River.” The state has provided Land for Maine’s Future Program water access funds to the Penobscot Trust so that boat launches in Eddington and Orono can be transferred to the towns for continued public use.

Successful completion of the Penobscot Project will enable the Penobscot Indian Nation to more fully engage in traditional cultural practices and gain sustenance from the river that is their homeland.

“The removal of the Veazie Dam is truly a historic day for our tribe and this great river. We are very grateful to everyone who has worked to make this day possible. Our relationship with the Penobscot River is at the very core of who we are as a people and plays a significant role in our spiritual and physical health,” said Chief Kirk Francis of the Penobscot Indian Nation. “This river being restored to its natural state with health and vitality means everything to our people.”

Restoring the Penobscot River ecosystem is expected to reinvigorate long-valued outdoor traditions, such as fishing, fly-tying, fly rod-making, canoe building, bird-watching, and paddling, and expand recreation and tourism opportunities, benefitting local and regional economies for years to come. Generous support over many years from numerous public and private sources laid the foundation for this occasion.

“Removing Veazie Dam is the biggest step yet to open the river and rebuild the Penobscot’s once abundant sea-run fisheries,” said Laura Rose Day, Executive Director of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, owner of the dam. “Credit for this historic milestone is due to many remarkable partners whose time, passion and resources are helping reconnect the Penobscot River to the sea. We are fortunate to work with so many committed people, towns, public and private funders, businesses and organizations to realize the Penobscot River’s full potential.”

Major support for Veazie Dam deconstruction comes from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, The Wyss Foundation, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This work is also made possible by generous private support from foundations, individuals and other sources.

The Penobscot River Restoration Trust is a non-profit organization responsible for completing the core aspects of the restoration effort. 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 Department of Commerce (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Department of the Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), State of Maine (ME Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, ME Department of Marine Resources), PPL Corporation and Black Bear Hydro Partners, LLC.

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