Penobscot River -- Ecosystem Recovery

NOAA Fisheries' work on the Penobscot River reflects a comprehensive approach to protect and restore valuable resources and habitat on the largest river in Maine and the second largest river in New England.

credit: Heather Perry ©

NOAA Fisheries Service Penobscot River Effort

Protection, Understanding, Recovery and Restoration

We are collaborating with the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, Tribal Nations, state and federal partners, conservation organizations, community groups and private industry on this effort. The goal -- improve access to key habitat for federally managed species, listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act including Atlantic salmon, Atlantic sturgeon and shortnose sturgeon as well as American shad, blueback herring, alewife and other species of sea-run fish.

To date, NOAA Fisheries has committed more than $21.4 million to the restoration of the Penobscot River Ecosystem, $1 million of which was for Veazie dam removal. In June, 2013, we announced that would be awarding around $1.4 million in additional funding to support dam removal efforts and monitoring post-removal, including fish migration, water quality, habitat, and vegetation.

Through applied multi-disciplinary research focused on a watershed approach, NOAA Fisheries and our partners strive to better understand habitat connectivity so we can more effectively manage and recover sea-run fish populations habitats and ecosystems. Restored aquatic ecosystems have aesthetic value as well as economic benefits because they support countless commercial and recreational activities.

Habitat Conservation and Species Recovery

- We fund habitat restoration and provide technical assistance for projects including dam removals, culvert replacements, fish ladders, and river restoration.
- We provide staff support and funding to purchase large-scale dams, fish passage engineering, project design and construction, and permitting for projects like the Great Works, Veazie, and Howland dams.
- We identify and implement recovery actions for Atlantic salmon, shortnose sturgeon and Atlantic sturgeon.

- We conduct regulatory reviews as required under various federal laws to protect endangered species and other important fish habitats.
- We review relicensing applications for hydro-electric projects, prescribing measures to restore access to key habitats for migratory species and improve river water flow so fish are able to migrate to these areas.
- We review other development projects that can affect species and habitats in the river system.

Research

- Together with partners, we conduct applied multi-disciplinary research to better understand predator-prey interactions and fish habitat requirements, ecosystem recovery and changes to wetland communities along the river.
- We design, coordinate, and fund baseline and post-dam removal monitoring.
- We supported 9 studies that have collected at least 2 years of pre-dam removal data for dams on the Penobscot. Six of these were focused on sea-run fish response, which makes this one of the most intensive fisheries monitoring efforts at a dam removal site anywhere in the country.

Atlantic sturgeon photo courtesy NOAA.

For more information on NOAA's Habitat Conservation, Protected Resources and Restoration programs in the Northeast, please visit our websites:

http://www.nero.noaa.gov/hcd/

http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/

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Image of Penobscot River on front credit: Heather Perry courtesy of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust.