

Protecting Maine Rivers

The Natural Resources Council of Maine was founded in 1959 to protect the Allagash River from dams that threatened to destroy one of the nation's wildest rivers. We won that battle in 1966 with creation of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, and we have been a tireless crusader for river protection ever since.

Maine's major rivers – including the Penobscot, Androscoggin, and Kennebec – all have greatly improved water quality and healthier fisheries because of our advocacy work. We've battled against paper mill pollution through the relicensing of Maine's mills, and we've pushed through successful river protection bills at the State House. We helped defeat the Big A Dam, which would have destroyed the West Branch of the Penobscot River, and our 10-year campaign for removal of the Edwards Dam succeeded in 1999 – resulting in a rebirth of the Kennebec. Our subsequent successful effort to get the Ft. Halifax dam removed on the Sebasticook River has resulted in the largest annual run of river herring (alewives) in the U.S. Last spring, two million alewives swam past the former Edwards and Ft. Halifax dam sites, arriving at Benton Falls where a modern fish lift enabled them to gain access to critical spawning habitat.

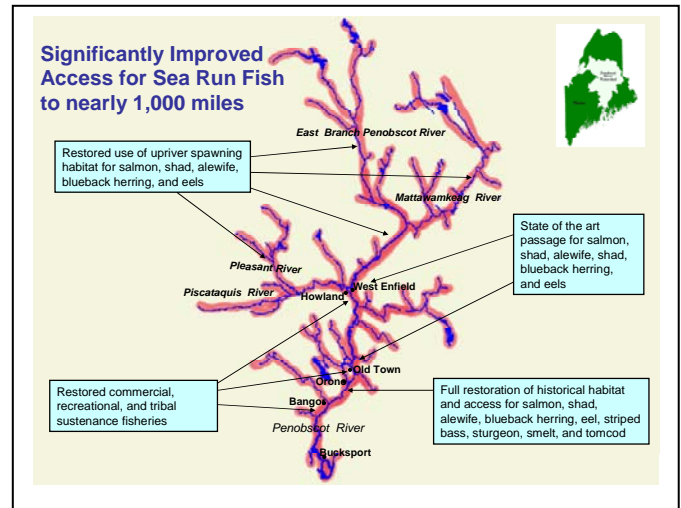
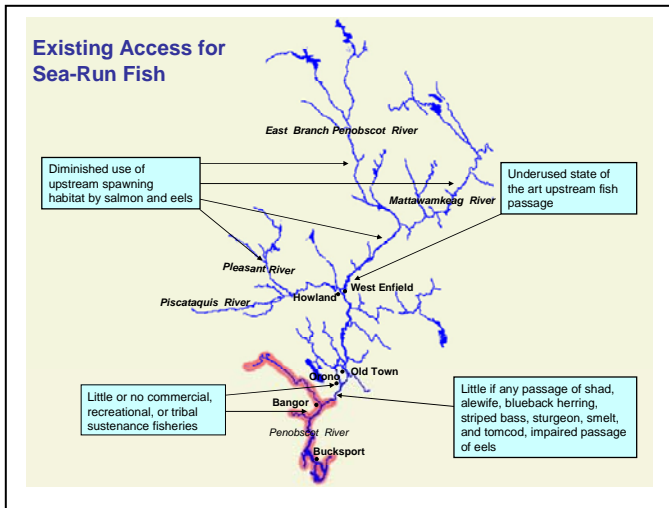


The Year Ahead

Penobscot River Restoration: NRCM is part of one of the most important river restoration projects currently underway in the entire U.S., and it will reach an exciting milestone – removal of the Great Works Dam – during 2011. The Penobscot River Restoration Project involves a broad coalition of environmental groups, state and federal agencies, and the Penobscot Indian Nation. As a founding member, NRCM helped negotiate the agreement to purchase three dams from the dam owner. Two dams will be removed, a nature-like bypass will be built around the third, and hydropower generation will be increased at six dams – resulting in essentially no net loss of electricity generation. Our coalition raised the \$25 million needed to purchase the dams, and removal of the Great Works Dam is slated to start in summer 2011. We and our partners are in the process of raising additional private and public funds to complete the project, which will provide improved access for native sea-run fish to reach 1,000 miles of rivers and streams (see reverse).

Restoring Alewives to the St. Croix: NRCM is helping to lead a coalition of groups to improve the health of the St. Croix River and its fisheries. Over the past 15 years, a misguided Maine law has required that two dams on the St. Croix be operated in a way that blocks upstream passage of alewives to their native spawning grounds. An annual alewife run in the St. Croix crashed from 2.6 million in the mid-1980s to fewer than 10,000 fish in 2008. Estimates suggest that the St. Croix could support as many as 20 million alewives if the dams were simply operated as they were designed. A small group of fishing guides believes that alewives pose a threat to smallmouth bass, a non-native species important for recreational fishing. The science does not support this view. NRCM fought to get the law changed and, failing action at the Legislature, organized 50 groups to appeal the issue to the International Joint Commission, a U.S.-Canadian body with jurisdiction over boundary water disputes. We now are mobilizing science, legal argument, and public opinion to convince the IJC to use its legal authority to order that the St. Croix be opened to alewife passage.

Benefits to the Penobscot River: The Penobscot River Restoration Project has been described by the National Academy of Sciences as the last best hope for restoring endangered Atlantic salmon.



Benefits to the St. Croix: Restoring healthy runs of alewives to the St. Croix will benefit the entire watershed, from eagle and osprey along the river to fisheries in the Gulf of Maine.



Other NRCM Watershed Action

- Working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish science-based standards for construction and repair of culverts in Maine. Currently there are tens of thousands of culverts that are blocking natural stream flow for invertebrates, fish, and other wildlife.
- Working to prevent construction of a dam on the Crooked River, which would threaten water quality and land-locked salmon of Sebago Lake.
- Working to clean up the Androscoggin River through a variety of advocacy approaches aimed at getting the Verso paper mill to reduce its pollution into the river. The Androscoggin still does not meet minimum water quality standards of the Clean Water Act forty years after the law was enacted through the leadership of Sen. Ed Muskie, who grew up along the Androscoggin.

