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Maine Conservationists Reach Milestone in Plan to Buy 3 Dams

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BOSTON — A [Maine](#) environmental coalition announced Thursday that it had raised the \$25 million it needed to buy three dams from a power company under an agreement to restore a number of fish species in the Penobscot River.

The coalition, the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, will remove two of the three dams and build a fish run around the third, opening up 1,000 miles of the Penobscot and its tributaries, home to most of the country's Atlantic salmon population.

The agreement, announced in 2004, was brokered among environmental groups, the federal government, the State of Maine, Native Americans and the PPL Corporation, the power company that owns the dams.

The goal is to restore the struggling Atlantic salmon population as well as other native fish, including the American shad and river herring. All have had trouble getting above the dams to spawn, their access impeded on their return from the ocean. That will change with the purchase, which involves the three dams farthest downriver.

About \$15 million to buy the dams came from federal grants, while the rest of the \$25 million was privately donated. Laura Rose Day, executive director of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, said that the organization would most likely complete the purchase next year and that the two dams to be removed would probably be gone in 2011 or 2012.

Under the agreement, PPL will be permitted to make up for the loss of power by increasing the power generated at other dams the company owns along the Penobscot and its tributaries.

The state and environmental groups have spent years cleaning the river, once heavily polluted by paper mills and other factories that lined its banks. State officials hope the project will bring an economic lift to towns along the river, where many of those mills have closed.

“We have a cleaner river now, but it is nearly devoid of fish above the dams,” Ms. Day said. “This will bring these fish back.”

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