

The Economy of the Penobscot

Penobscot River Restoration Project

By

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A Brief Look at:

- The Importance of Rivers to Maine's Economy
- The Economic History of the Penobscot
- Community River Revitalization Efforts
- New Opportunities for Communities Resulting from the Penobscot River Restoration Project

Maine's Rivers and the Economy

- Maine's economy and its rivers are intertwined.
- The navigable rivers of Maine became the arteries of the State and forged its economy.
- Native Americans and early settlers used the rivers for fishing, trade and transportation.
- Most Maine communities derived their economic base from the river resource.
- The lumber, the ice, the fish, the ships the men and cargoes from Maine could travel from Maine's rivers to any port in the world.

A Brief History of the Penobscot Economy

- Prior to the Revolutionary War, the Penobscot was a key transportation and trade route for Native American's, trappers and early settler's in the region.
- By the mid 19th century Bangor became the largest lumber port in the world, with over 3,000 ships per year visited Bangor's docks.
- During the 19th century, the Penobscot River and its watershed became an attraction for recreational fisherman and hunters who contributed significantly to the regional economy.
 - Micro-economy of "the Maine Guides".
- The Penobscot River had a significant commercial fishery.
 - In 1880 over 110,000 lbs of Salmon where harvested in the Penobscot.
 - Shad and Alewife were also important commercial fisheries to the region.

A Brief History of the Penobscot Economy (Cont.)

- Starting around the turn of the 20th century, pulp and paper mills became an important part of the economic fabric of the Penobscot River corridor, which continues today.
- During these periods of economic growth, over 19 dams were constructed on the Penobscot and Piscataquis rivers to provide power to operate the various, textile, saw and paper mills and provide electric power to area residents and businesses.
- Like most industrial rivers in Maine, the Penobscot became quite polluted from both industrial and municipal waste disposal practices.

A Brief History of the Penobscot Economy (Cont.)

- During the mid 20st century, the community riverfronts in the region began a period of decay as a result of:
 - Reduction in use of waterways due to increasing usage of rail and highways to move goods.
 - Abandonment of working waterfronts.
 - Businesses moving inland and away from waterfronts.
 - Closing of traditional businesses due to product maturity, offshore competition and environmental regulation.
 - Environmental degradation and pollution.

Community Riverfront Revitalization Efforts – A Hot Topic

- Communities nationally are rediscovering the importance of waterfronts as economic engines.
- The primary drivers for riverfront development today are:
 - Water Quality Improvements
 - Economic Development
 - Brownfield Revitalization
 - Park Space and Greenways
 - Historic Preservation
 - Wildlife and Fish Habitat Restoration
 - Recreational Usage

Community Riverfront Revitalization Efforts (Cont.)

- There are numerous examples of successful corridor-wide river revitalization initiatives:
 - South Platte River – Colorado
 - Blackstone and Woonasquatucket Rivers
 - Massachusetts and Rhode Island
 - Connecticut River – CT, NH, MA, VT
 - Kennebec River - Maine

Community Riverfront Revitalization Efforts (Cont.)

- Over 40 Maine Communities are engaged in significant riverfront revitalization efforts to add new vitality to their towns. Some notable examples include:
 - Bangor, Brewer, Old Town, Orono, Bucksport, Dover-Foxcroft/Guilford, Newport, Augusta, Waterville, Gardiner, Bath, Richmond, Lewiston, Auburn, Topsham, Brunswick, Saco, Biddeford, Westbrook and Kittery.

New Opportunities

- Riverfront revitalization efforts on the Penobscot will help towns enhance the livability and attractiveness of their communities for residents and newcomers.
 - New Business Investment.
- Improving the quality of the natural resource of the Penobscot will:
 - Position the region to capture a significant market share of the fast growing nature, cultural and historical based “Experiential Tourism” industry.
 - Enhance recreational use of the river.
 - Re-establish commercial fishing economies (Alewife).

New Opportunities (Cont.)

- The Penobscot River Restoration Project will create unprecedented opportunities where ecological goals and economic development goals can be mutually beneficial.
 - Opportunity to reinvigorate the river habitat for fish and other wildlife.
 - Opportunity for river communities to rediscover and redevelop their waterfronts.
 - Opportunity to celebrate and benefit from the river's environmental and cultural history.
 - Opportunity to enhance public access and recreational uses of the river.
 - Opportunity for towns to enhance their existing commercial and industrial activities and develop new projects.
 - Opportunity for communities to collaborate on regional initiatives.

New Opportunities (Cont.)

- Exciting New Business Opportunities to Pursue:
 - Water dependent business enterprises that support recreational activities (boating and fishing shops, boat, canoe and kayak sales and rentals, marinas, guide services, float plane services, etc.).
 - Adaptive multi-tenant reuse of historic waterfront properties (professional offices, shops, restaurants, artisans, etc.).
 - Tourism oriented business enterprises (hotels, inns, resorts, sporting camps, tourism trails, etc.).
 - Cultural/historic business enterprises (museum shops, Native American products, etc.).
 - Multi-family housing.
 - Regional business parks that incorporate smart growth and green infrastructure features.
 - Annual festivals (Shad, Herring, Alewife, Salmon, etc.).

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