

The Penobscot River Paddling Trail

The Penobscot is Maine's largest river and the second largest in New England. It drains 8,570 square miles of land. The main stem, which the Penobscot River Paddling Trail covers, is just over 100 miles of mostly wild, scenic, and rural land. Bangor/Brewer is the only urban stretch of river. The Penobscot offers a combination of flatwater and whitewater, and plenty of access points for day use to long distance trips.

The original people of the Penobscot, the Wabanaki, have been here over ten thousand years. Wabanaki still own and reside on islands and shoreline property on the river. European settlers arrived 500 years ago with disease and weapons, decimating the Wabanaki tribes and occupying the land.

In the 18th century, the logging industry changed the river with dams, log jams and debris. Both Wabanaki and European Americans were river drivers. Paper mills sprang up, using water power and discharging effluent into the river. Hydroelectric dams have marked the 20th and 21st centuries, accompanied by development. Log drives ended in the 1970s. Paper mills have closed or moved away. Dams have been removed or negotiated with fish bypass or elevators by the Penobscot River Restoration Project, 1999-2016, founded by seven nonprofits and additional partners.

The river has been recovering its natural heritage, rising through higher water quality classifications, affording habitat for migratory fish to return to their ancestral spawning streams. Native sea-run fish returning include shad, alewives, short-nosed and Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic salmon. Eagle and osprey populations are also increasing, along with other riverine animal species. Wabanaki people have revived cultural heritage canoeing experiences. Fishing for bass, an introduced species, is a popular sport. Today, the Penobscot River is a river reborn, ready for your adventure. Enjoy!

For Your Safety

Use PFDs. All boats must carry an approved life jacket for each person. Use them!

Be prepared for cold water. Wear your life jacket, stay fueled and hydrated, avoid cotton, pack extra clothes in a dry bag, and know the symptoms and treatment for hypothermia.

Know the location of rapids and dams. Warning signage is not always present!

Be aware of river flows before your trip. Check USGS gages and flow forecasts online before your trip.

Etiquette Guidelines

Share the river. Give anglers a wide berth, and be efficient at busy access points.

Respect Private Lands. Please note that all islands in the Penobscot belong to the Penobscot Nation. Permission is required to land. Campsites have been established with permission of individual landowners who may withdraw the privilege if they feel it necessary

Respect wildlife. Observe wildlife from a distance, and do not disturb nesting birds or basking turtles.

Leave no trace. Carry out all trash.

Prevent the spread of invasive exotic species. Clean, drain, and dry your boats and gear thoroughly between each trip.

Use existing campsites. We depend on the goodwill of landowners.

Overview Map

