

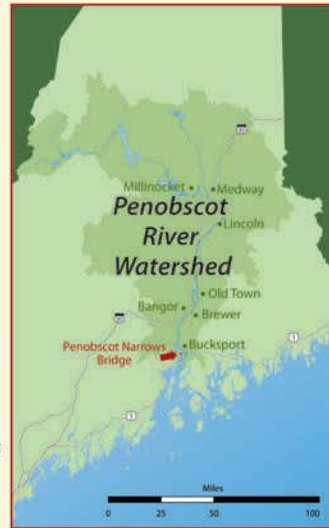
The Penobscot River



You are standing on the western bank of the Penobscot River, the largest river in Maine and the second largest river system in New England (after the Connecticut).

The name "Penobscot" is derived from the Native American word for "waters of descending ledge," or "place of the white rocks," in reference to the numerous rocky rapids and falls in the lower river. The river has provided navigation, sustenance, and cultural identity to area residents for thousands of years.

The main river channel begins at the confluence of the West Branch Penobscot River, which arises in western Maine near the Canadian border, and the East Branch, which originates in the lake-filled region north of Mount Katahdin. Other major rivers that flow into the Penobscot include the Piscataquis, Mattawamkeag, Passadumkeag, Kenduskeag, Marsh River, and Cove Brook.



At 8,592 square miles, the Penobscot watershed encompasses more than one-quarter of the state's land area. Most of the watershed—90 percent—is forest. These forests are home to moose, bear, deer, lynx, bobcat, marten, fisher, and many songbirds. Forests ensure that the river's source waters remain clean and healthy habitat for otters, eagles, osprey, and waterfowl including Barrow's goldeneyes, black ducks, and common mergansers.

Many fish pass through the estuary on their way to freshwater spawning grounds in the river's tributaries, including shad, striped bass, Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, alewives, blueback herring, rainbow smelt, tomcod, sea lamprey and American eel and the largest run of wild Atlantic salmon in the United States. The watershed contains prime habitat for native brook trout and other cold-water species, and the lower river has an excellent bass fishery.

While the river is still recovering from centuries of logging and industrial use, the Penobscot remains an integral part of the region's ecology and economy, and serves as a vital link between the northern forest and the sea. ■



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Map by S. Nelson, George J. Mitchell Center.
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