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A Plan for the Future of the Presumpscot River: Introduction and Overview

Presumpscot River Management Plan Steering Committee

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Representatives of the following organizations participated substantially as members of the Steering Committee in the development of the background information and/or the development of this Plan. Their participation does not necessarily imply endorsement of the Plan. Please see discussion on page 1.

Coastal Conservation Association

Friends of the Presumpscot River

Greater Portland Council of Governments

Hannaford Brothers

Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission

Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection

Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Maine Dept. of Marine Resources

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Portland Trails

Portland Water District

Presumpscot River Watch

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

A Plan for the Future of the Presumpscot River



Reflecting the Views of
the Presumpscot River Management Plan Steering Committee

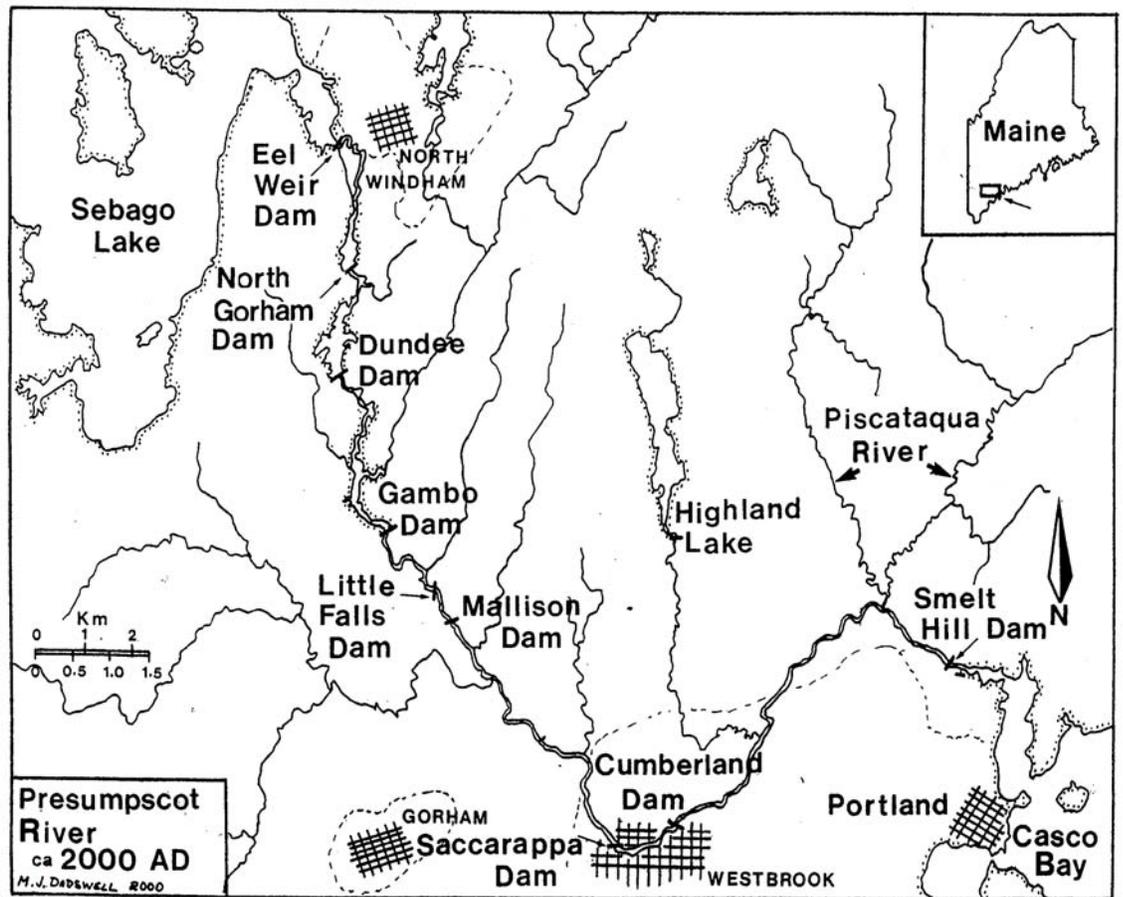
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And
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August 18, 2003

Presumpscot River *A Plan for the Future*



Introduction and Overview

The Presumpscot River Management Plan Steering Committee is pleased to present this draft management plan for the Presumpscot River. It reflects three years of background research on major issues of concern, development and review of options for addressing these concerns, and lastly, after input from several public meetings and a written public comment period, development of the Final Plan recommendations.

Background

In the Spring of 2000, the Casco Bay Estuary Project (CBEP) initiated a planning effort for the Presumpscot River involving a diverse group of stakeholders. The CBEP has an interest in the river since it is the largest freshwater source to Casco Bay. Interest in the river had grown in response to plans for the removal of the head-of-tide dam (Smelt Hill Dam, later removed in the Fall of 2002), and dramatic improvements in water quality resulting from the cessation of SAPPI Fine Paper's pulp mill operations in Westbrook. These two events opened new possibilities for the future of the river.

The Presumpscot River originates at Sebago Lake, Maine's second largest lake, which serves as the water supply for Greater Portland. The river, from the Eel Weir Dam at the outlet of Sebago Lake to the head-of-tide, is 27 miles long. It presently has eight dams that block the passage of migratory sea-run fish and impound most of its length from the Cumberland Mills Dam in Westbrook to the Eel Weir Dam at Sebago Lake.

The focus of the planning effort is the Presumpscot River, the adjacent river corridor lands, and to some extent its tributaries, from Eel Weir Dam to Casco Bay. The Plan does not include or address issues related to Sebago Lake levels.

Steering Committee

To develop a plan for the future of the Presumpscot River, the CBEP solicited interest in developing such a plan from a broad group of stakeholders including all five municipalities that border the river. Interested parties were then convened as a steering committee to guide the development of the plan. The Presumpscot River Management Plan Steering Committee is composed of representatives of federal, state and local government agencies, businesses, and conservation organizations and interests. In addition, one municipality actively followed the plan development process.

The goal of the Steering Committee has been to work cooperatively to develop a plan for the future of the river, and to develop recommendations that work for all interests.

SAPPI Fine Paper (formerly S. D. Warren Company), owner of seven of the dams on the river, participated on the Steering Committee for the first two years of the process; including the development of final white papers on Fisheries (May 29, 2002), Cumulative Impacts (June 11, 2002), and a draft Open Space White Paper (June 11, 2002). In addition, SAPPI participated in the public information sessions during June 2002. In November 2002, SAPPI withdrew from the planning process and was not involved in developing the draft or final Management Plan, or the final Open Space White Paper.

Purposes

The purposes of the planning effort were twofold:

1. to develop a comprehensive and unified plan with management objectives to

guide future actions and decisions that impact the river; and

2. to identify opportunities (recommended actions) for supporting continued improvements to the health of the river and its tributaries, and for capitalizing on the potential of a healthy river ecosystem for providing a diversity of public benefits, including recreational, educational and economic benefits; in balance with the benefits of renewable hydropower energy.

Focus Areas

The Steering Committee identified three issues around which to develop its vision and plan for the future of the Presumpscot River:

- Cumulative Impacts to the River
- Fisheries Conditions and Opportunities
- Open Space Conditions and Opportunities

The Steering Committee worked over a period of two years to develop an information base and proposed management objectives for each of these focus areas. White papers were drafted detailing what is known about the issues, and identifying options for addressing related problems or opportunities. These white papers are posted on the Casco Bay Estuary Project web site: www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu, or may be obtained by contacting the Casco Bay Estuary Project at 207-780-4306. They are included as Appendices to this Plan.

Developing the Final Plan

The Committee's work, including a summary of the white papers, was presented at a series of public informational meetings held in June of 2002.

Following the public information meetings, the Steering Committee worked to develop a draft Plan, including a vision for the future management of the river, its shoreland corridor, and to some extent its tributaries, with recommendations for actions that will support the achievement of that vision. This Final Plan was developed after a public hearing (May 7, 2003) and comment period.

It is hoped that this Plan will be used to guide future actions and activities affecting the river, and that it will promote stewardship and partnerships between individuals, community groups, interest groups, and all levels of governments, working together towards a vibrant future for the Presumpscot River.

The Plan includes the highlights of each of the white papers, and concludes with a Vision Statement, Recommended Management Objectives, and a Summary of Recommended Actions. Appendix A includes a more detailed presentation of the Plan Recommendations. Appendix B is a record of public comments received on the Draft Plan, with the Steering Committee's responses to those comments. Appendices C, D, and E are the three white papers providing a detailed treatment of the issues addressed by this Plan.

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