RECREATIONAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS
Of Edwards Dam Removal

"I see the removal of the dam and the resulting Capital Riverfront Improvement District as a catalyst for the rehabilitation and restoration of the downtown and northern end of Augusta."
Delaine Nye, citizen appointee by Governor King to the Capital Riverfront Improvement District.

Recreational Opportunities Abound

Boaters and anglers have returned to the area in large numbers. Prior to removal of the Edwards Dam, access to the Kennebec River from Waterville to Augusta was difficult and slow without a sizeable motorboat. Today, kayakers and canoeists can select any number of day-long canoe trips along the river, from Waterville to Sidney, Sidney to Augusta or Waterville to Augusta.

Riverbanks have fully revegetated, creating new shoreline habitat and increased habitat diversity. Before the Edwards Dam was removed, any people feared that muddy banks, exposed by lower water levels after the dam removal, would be unsightly and deter recreational use. Instead, the exposed river banks have grown back quickly and vigorously, creating new and varied habitat for native plants, birds, insects and animals.

Natural water levels have allowed the rapids, riffles and gravel bar islands of the Kennebec to re-establish themselves. These scenic, submerged for 162 years by the Edwards Dam, provide beauty and variety for river visitors and critical habitat for fish, birds, insects and plants.

Communities Being Reborn Along the River

Augusta's Capital Riverfront Improvement District (CRID) is using the removal of the Edwards Dam as the keystone of its efforts to revitalize Augusta's downtown core. The District's legislative purpose is to "protect the scenic character of the Kennebec River corridor while providing continued public access and an opportunity for community and economic development ..." With funding and leadership from the August CRID, the Kennebec River waterfront is being cleaned and beautified, underutilized buildings are being renovated and converted into housing and commercial space, and the Edwards Mill Park is now on its way to completion.

The Edwards Mill Park is now a reality. Since removal of the Edwards Dam and the clearing of industrial debris from the Edwards mill site, the 17 acre riverfront parcel occupied by the former Edwards textile mill and dam has been converted to a highly used park, which features a summer carnival, a weekly farmers' market, a new canoe and kayak launch, and a wooded, riverfront nature trail. The City of Augusta's recent acquisition of 90 acres of land along Bond Brook, which joins the Kennebec at the Edwards Mill Park, is the centerpiece of a new effort to create hiking and skiing trails that connect Bond Brook to the Kennebec River and the Kennebec River rail trail from Augusta to Gardiner.

Kennebec River communities are restoring their downtown riverfronts. Since the Edwards Dam removal, the cities of Hallowell, Gardiner and Waterville have also begun major efforts to revitalize and renovate the Kennebec River waterfront in their communities.

Riverfront Community Development Bond. In November 2007 Maine voters approved funding for the $5 Million Riverfront Community Development Bond, which provides matching funds to help Maine's riverfront communities revitalize their underutilized riverfront areas – many of which harbor idle factory buildings or empty lots which can be renewed as attractive downtown housing and shopping areas, and community green space along the rivers.

Benton Alewife Harvest. The town of Benton has reasserted its historic right to harvest alewives – a right that had been meaningless for over 150 years. With the removal of the Fort Halifax Dam in Winslow last summer, alewives were allowed into the Sabasticook, a tributary of the Kennebec, for the first time since the early 1800s. The town of Benton, on the Sabasticook, still holds a historic right to harvest alewives. The town decided to exercise its right, and contracted the alewife harvest out to a commercial harvester for a fee this year. The alewife harvest employed several people, generated funds for the town, and much of the harvest was sold to lobsterman for bait.

Likewise, alewives were also harvested on Vassalboro's Webber Pond this year for the first time in centuries.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS
Of Edwards Dam Removal

"The thing about the Kennebec is that it's so diverse. We saw uncountable numbers of brown trout, we caught alewives, as many small mouth bass as we wanted and an unbelievable number of stripers. We also saw eagles and osprey. With its gravel bars, ledges and waterfalls, the river is beautiful." – Bob Dionne, Aardvark Outfitters

Water Quality has Significantly Improved

Water quality improves dramatically. Before Edwards Dam was removed, the impoundment could not meet minimum water quality standards and could not begin to support a healthy river ecosystem. Just months after the removal of Edwards dam, state scientists documented a dramatic improvement in water quality. The river has been officially upgraded to class B to reflect the improvement in river health.

Fish and Anglers alike will welcome the dramatic increase in mayflies and stoneflies. Mayflies and stoneflies, rarely seen in samples before the removal of Edwards, have dramatically increased in numbers.

Migratory Fish are Returning

Alewives can now swim freely to the top of the Sebasticook River, 70 miles upstream from the former Edwards Dam. State fisheries biologists estimate that two million alewives returned to the Kennebec in 2009, which means it is among the largest river-herring runs in the United States! The Sebasticook River is the largest tributary of the Kennebec and enters the Kennebec at Winslow. Since 1999, fishways have been built at the two dams on the Sebasticook, at Benton and Burnham, and at the outlet of Sebasticook Lake in Newport. Alewives can now swim the entire length of the Kennebec and Sebasticook to their historic spawning grounds in the many lakes and ponds of the 1,000 square mile Sebasticook River watershed. The large historic alewife run of the Seven Mile Stream watershed in Vassalboro, at Webber Pond and Three Mile Pond, is now nearing full restoration, with the completion this year of a fishway at the outlet of Webber Pond.

American shad, the "poor man's salmon," are now travelling by the thousands upriver to Waterville and Winslow, where they have created a new recreational fishery at Fort Halifax park. American shad can reach 3 feet long and over 10 pounds. Kennebec River shad are now successfully spawning at many locations along the Kennebec from Waterville to Augusta, using habitat that was inaccessible and unusable before the removal of the Edwards Dam. With fish passage now in place on the Sebasticook River, American shad have access to their entire historic habitat on the Kennebec's largest tributary.

Atlantic salmon, the Kennebec's most famous and most endangered fish are increasing in number at Waterville, where the adults are trapped and transported to their prime coldwater spawning grounds in the Sandy River. In 2006, Kennebec River Atlantic salmon swam and spawned in the Sandy River for the first time in 150 years. It is believed there are fewer than 50 Atlantic salmon returning to the Kennebec each year. Salmon were documented spawning in the Kennebec River above the Edwards Dam site as soon as the dam was removed. Kennebec River Atlantic salmon are now protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Sea lamprey, have sucker like mouths that allowed some of them to climb up over the Edwards Dam before it was removed. Sea lamprey are vitally important native fish of the Kennebec which serve as food for adult and juvenile bald eagles and dig immense spawning beds in river gravel which assist female Atlantic salmon during their own spawning chores. The number of sea lamprey has dramatically increased since the Edwards Dam was removed and they are now a common sight at Ticonic Falls in Waterville during their early June spawning migration.

Striped bass, an angler's favorite, known in Maine to reach up to 67 pounds, have become the principal recreational fishery in Waterville and Winslow, 18 miles above the former Edwards Dam, and all along the river reach in Sidney, Vassalboro and Augusta.

American eel, the Kennebec's most abundant sea-run fish, now have full and safe access up and down the Kennebec River from Waterville to the sea and free access up the entire Sebasticook River. American eel populations have declined dramatically in the United States in recent years and have recently been considered for listing under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. American eel still suffer severe mutilation and mortality at the remaining hydroelectric dams on the Kennebec River. In contrast to the Kennebec, the owners of the two hydroelectric dams on the Sebasticook River have installed state of the art, fish-friendly turbine bypass systems that do not kill migrating eels.

Atlantic sturgeon, the Kennebec's largest fish, reaching over 10 feet in length, are now regularly seen leaping out of the river from Augusta to Waterville during their mid-summer spawning migrations. Atlantic sturgeon is a candidate species for protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Shortnose sturgeon, the smaller cousin of the Atlantic sturgeon, now swim all the way to Ticonic Falls in Waterville, their historic migration limit, to spawn during the spring. Prior to the removal of the Edwards Dam, scientists were unsure if both sturgeon species would use the entire restored 18 mile reach of the Kennebec. The sturgeons have now answered this question. Shortnose sturgeon is protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Blueback herring, which closely resemble the alewife but spawn in rivers, rather than ponds, have now re-occupied their entire historic habitat in the Kennebec River from Waterville to Augusta and are increasing in number. Bluebacks spawn in June in the Kennebec's shallow riffles and rapids, which have been restored to their natural condition by the removal of the Edwards Dam. Reaching a length of 10 inches, blueback herring are the primary early summer food source for striped bass, osprey, great blue heron and cormorants.