

Maine hosting Japanese group for idea exchange

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PORTLAND - A Japanese delegation from the Aomori Prefecture will make a five-day visit to Portland, Augusta and four other communities next week to exchange ideas on alternative energy, business and aquaculture.

The delegation includes government officials, business leaders and university faculty members from a Japanese energy think tank.

The visit, from Sept. 6-10, will include stops at the Gulf of Maine Research Center in Portland, as well as presentations at the Maine International Trade Center, the University of Maine's Offshore Wind Laboratory, the Maine Aquaculture Association and the Maine Shellfish Growers.

The visit was organized by the Maine-Aomori Sister State Advisory Council.

"(The council's) mission is to identify and assess existing activities and exchanges with Aomori and devise strategies to develop cultural, educational and commercial opportunities between the sister states," said Stephen MacDougall, the council's chairman, in a press release. This visit, he wrote, will "quite possibly reveal the potential for joint research and development programs."

Maine's relationship with the Aomori Prefecture dates to 1889, when the 1,500-ton ship Cheseborough, sailing from Bath, wrecked off the coast of Aomori. Residents from the village of Shariki rescued four survivors and buried the people who died, including Peter Erickson, the captain.

Amid the wreckage that drifted ashore, the people of Shariki discovered Maine pears, and enjoyed them so much that they planted pear trees of their own. Every year, the people of Shariki hold a service for the sailors who lost their lives on that night in 1889.