

American Fisheries Society • American Fly Fishing Trade Association • American Sportfishing Association • Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies • B.A.S.S. LLC • Berkley Conservation Institute, Pure Fishing • Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation • National Marine Manufacturers Association • Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association • Trout Unlimited • Western Native Trout Initiative

August 29, 2011

The Honorable Jack Reed, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Hart Senate Office Building, Room 728
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2406
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Hart Senate Office Building, Room 709
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Norm Dicks, Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2467
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Murkowski and Ranking Member Dicks:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of America's anglers, conservationists, scientists and fisheries managers, urge you to address specific components of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Fisheries Program's budget for the 2012 fiscal year. Several proposed funding cuts proposed by both the President and the House Appropriations Committee will destroy invaluable fisheries management and conservation projects that are vital to sustaining viable fish populations on our nation's waterways and the jobs the fishery resources support. While the fisheries community understands the necessity of fiscal responsibility and budget cuts to address the budget deficit, we believe savings can be achieved more prudently elsewhere in the Fisheries Program.

Healthy waterways and robust fish populations are vital to the well-being of our society and economy. They provide clean water and sustainable fisheries, provide jobs for our citizens and recreational enjoyment for millions, and support many local communities. Recreational fishing alone supports 1 million jobs and has a \$125 billion annual impact on our nation's economy.

The reductions proposed for the Fisheries Program will severely impact fisheries management in the U.S., undermining recent management successes and negatively impacting the economy. Our organizations respectfully request that you work to address the following concerns prior to approval of the program's FY2012 budget.

National Fish Hatchery System (NFHS): With current reductions in federal spending, the FWS has proposed an \$11 million reduction in NFHS funding for FY2012, with \$6 million coming from the account for those hatcheries providing fish to mitigate for loss of fisheries due to water development projects. If approved, this large reduction will result in the closure of nine hatcheries; seven of which are located in the southeastern U.S. The impacts of these closures will hit both recreational anglers and local economies.

Federal investment in fish hatcheries produces a strong return on investment and is a model of an economic multiplier effect. In the nine Southeastern United States alone, for example, the \$5 million spent on NFH-stocked fish generates \$239 million in local economic output and supports 3,100 jobs with incomes totaling \$63 million. This activity generates \$14 million in state and federal taxes.¹

The NFHS relies a great deal on volunteer work, which significantly cuts program costs and allows important funding dollars to be used directly for the rearing and release of hatchery fish. Additionally, these hatcheries are a career gateway for rural and Native American youth, helping to diversify FWS staff and invest youth in the stewardship of our environment at an early age. Through the use of volunteers and the implementation of the Youth Conservation Corps initiative, these hatcheries are avenues for introducing people to outdoors, outdoor skills and conservation. They increase recruitment and retention in the participation of traditional outdoor activities.

Several of the agencies that rely on these fish stocking operations, including the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), have failed to fully reimburse the FWS for its efforts. If the FWS does not receive full reimbursement, they have proposed stopping operations at these nine hatcheries.

- *Army Corps of Engineers*: The Interior has valued reimbursement needed from the Corps at \$4.7 million and the OMB Examiner for the Corps has accepted this number. Our organizations understand that the Corps and FWS have come to a reimbursement agreement of \$3.725 million. We support this agreement as a starting point, but believe that full reimbursement must be achieved. The compensation provided to the FWS for its NFHS efforts must remain within the Fisheries Program and be additive to its current base funding.
- *Bureau of Reclamation*: Our organizations strongly support an *initial* reimbursement of \$715,000 that will enable FWS to avoid base erosion of the Jones Hole hatchery. We understand that BOR mitigation reimbursement approaches \$9 million and that this needs to be addressed at the highest bureau level. While at face value this is an interagency issue, recreational fishermen and boaters are the ultimate losers when this money is not reimbursed, risking fishing opportunity, license sales and other economic values that the NFHS Program provides.

If FWS is not fully reimbursed by these two agencies, the large decrease in funding that is anticipated for the NFHS will be felt in local economies, as nationwide hatchery efforts support over 8000 jobs and result in almost \$35 million in state and local tax revenue every year.² The best remedy for this unfortunate situation is for Congress to either mandate that these partner agencies fully reimburse the FWS for their share of the hatchery operating costs or provide the Service with the necessary funding within the NFHS's budget to keep these facilities operating, complementary to the program's base funding, while reimbursements are negotiated.

Finally, we would add that this is not an issue that has only federal level impacts. States depend on these hatcheries to provide fish and recreational fishing opportunities, which support jobs in rural areas that depend on the recreational angler for their livelihood. Over the years the FWS has

¹ Sport Fishing & Boating Partnership Council, Programmatic Evaluation: Activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Program, FY 2005-2009 (June 21, 2010), p. 64.

² Conserving America's Fisheries: An Assessment of Economic Contributions from Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation

cut hatcheries through closures and transfers to states. The hatchery program has for some years been at the minimum staffing and size necessary to fulfill responsibilities, as well as recreational opportunities, and any additional losses would be devastating.

Fisheries Program Staffing: The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices (FWCOs) are the face of the Fisheries Program and the staff that realize conservation programs on-the-ground. Over 300 biologists and other professionals work to restore and maintain fish and other aquatic resources across the nation. Proposed budget reductions will result in the loss of 120 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs), in addition to currently vacant positions. This will considerably degrade the projects that the FWCOs are undertaking, including the National Fish Passage Program (NFPP) and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). Since 1999, the NFPP has restored tens of thousands of acres of fish habitat, providing an \$8.3 billion economic impact to surrounding communities and supporting 186,000 jobs. In addition, it has averaged a 3:1 ratio of non-federal funding to NFPP funding. Under NFHAP, Fish Habitat Partnerships have leveraged \$30 million in non-federal partner match to \$12 million in federal support since 2006 and have funded over 250 on-the-ground conservation projects. With the significant staffing cuts that the Fisheries Program is about to experience, these valuable programs will lose their ability to both leverage private dollars and to implement beneficial fishery conservation projects.

It is important to retain FWCO base funding because these are the staff that provide services to the public and tribes. The fisheries community asks for the restoration of the \$9.5 million cut. We also encourage FWS to consider downgrading the GS level of currently vacant positions. This will result in a cost savings and, along with the NFHS's Youth Conservation Corps, help recruit younger people into the FWS and promote stewardship of our environment.

Aquatic Invasive Species: The fisheries community supports the House Appropriations Committee's mark of \$8.2 million for the control of aquatic invasive species; however there remain uncertainties as to whether this money is being most effectively used within the account. Our organizations have concerns with the \$2 million appropriated to Asian carp control out of the Fisheries Program's base funding level without any explicit direction as to how and where this money will be spent. We believe that the FWS's role in aquatic invasive species management should be supportive of state programs, including through research grants and cooperative control projects with the Great Lakes states, rather than by implementing programs independently. The Great Lakes states should be in full accord with the spending program for aquatic invasive species funds.

Fisheries Science Programs: Over the years the Fisheries program has demonstrated that it is a responsive, science-based organization making significant contributions in fisheries science. The Fisheries Program's Fish Health, Fish Technology, Genetics and Population Dynamics capabilities support not only National Fish Hatchery work, but that of the FWCOs, and the fisheries management work of states, tribes and private aquaculture. We would encourage Congress to ensure that these aspects are adequately funded, staffed and secured. Although we understand that such scientific capabilities may be useful in other arenas, we would be opposed to any significant diversion of this expertise outside the Fisheries program.

Congressional and Presidential Earmarks: The fisheries community supports large-scale ecosystem restoration efforts. Congressionally and Presidentially directed restoration efforts can, in some cases, follow the Fisheries Program's core mission when they do not redirect staff and resources from other important core activities that further stretch staff and funding resources. In FY2010, five percent of Fisheries Program funding came from Congressional earmarks, and earmarked spending currently makes up five percent the President's FY2012 budget request for

the program. While we support the concepts of these restoration efforts, Presidential and Congressional earmarks should be complementary to base programmatic funding. These requests need to complement the Program's core efforts as well as the agency's staffing and ability to conduct a strategically aligned program in cooperation with stakeholders and partners.

As we have already made clear, healthy waterways and robust fish populations are vital to the well-being of our society and economy providing recreational enjoyment for millions and supporting many local communities, their tax base and jobs. Unfortunately, the Fisheries Program's FY2012 budgets proposed by the President and House Appropriations Committees will have a negative impact on many fisheries and aquatic habitats around the country and the recreational opportunities that come with it. This is a significant concern for the 60 million anglers who enjoy recreational fishing and the millions of others who depend on them for subsistence and commerce.

The Fisheries Program of the FWS provides some of the highest--if not the highest--economic benefits of all FWS programs. In 2010 dollars, the total economic contribution (direct, indirect and induced) of Fisheries Program and partner accomplishments were \$3.6 billion per year, with an additional \$456 million in consumer surplus for species held in refugia and \$301 million in equivalent value for subsistence activities. More than 68,000 jobs are associated with these economic outputs. These figures alone justify adequate funding for this program.

On behalf of the fisheries community, the undersigned organizations respectfully request that you consider our suggestions to more efficiently fund the FWS Fisheries Program and ensure that it continues to work as effectively as possible given the current budgetary concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
American Fly Fishing Trade Association
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
B.A.S.S. LLC
Berkley Conservation Institute, Pure Fishing

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
National Marine Manufacturers Association
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
Trout Unlimited
Western Native Trout Initiative

Cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Members of the House Committee on Appropriations
Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior
Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bryan Arroyo, Assistant Director of Fisheries and Habitat Conservation