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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0301

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The Honorable Dan Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC, 20240

Dear Director Ashe,

I write you today regarding the future of the rainbow trout stocking program at the Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery as well as the National Fish Hatchery System in general. As you know, a witness from the Fish and Wildlife Service testified at the July 25, 2014 hearing on my legislation, H.R. 5026, the Fish Hatchery Protection Act, at the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs.

Some troubling facts were revealed at the hearing. Namely, that the Service failed to hold a public comment period and did not consider job losses or associated economic impact before terminating important recreational fishing programs. Even Deputy Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Steve Guertin, testified, **“This was not our [the Fish and Wildlife Service’s] finest hour.”**

The Deputy Director went on to testify that the Service did not consider 1,700 jobs in Mohave County and \$75 million in economic output associated with the Willow Beach Hatchery or the 4,000 jobs and \$80 million in payroll nationally before terminating rainbow trout stocking programs throughout the country.

Here is an important exchange from that hearing:

Rep. Gosar: The Fish and Wildlife Service stated in a letter to this Subcommittee sent on May 30, 2014 that the reason for terminating the rainbow trout stocking program at the time was that the agency didn’t have the 1.5 to 8.5 million dollars to repair a broken water [supply] line and to keep the trout stocking program going... Recent engineering reports indicate that these estimates were a gross exaggeration and that the broken water [supply] line would only cost around \$100,000 to fix. If the water, now listen very carefully, if the water supply line is fixed, does the Fish and Wildlife Service plan to reinstate the trout propagation program at the Willow Beach Hatchery?

Deputy Director Guertin: *I believe we would, yes.*

Given that this issue is of critical importance to my constituents and me, I have outlined some questions for you below, and I respectfully ask for a timely response so that I may share your answers with relevant stakeholders and concerned constituents.

1. Last October, the Fish and Wildlife Service ceased production of rainbow trout at the Willow Beach NFH citing “water line failures”. At that time the agency stated they didn’t have the \$1.5 to \$8.5 million to repair the broken water supply line. Recent engineering reports indicate that these estimates were a gross exaggeration and that the broken water supply line could be fixed along with other improvements for less than \$500,000. Does the agency plan to appropriate money to fix the water supply line and/or develop new infrastructure so the rainbow trout stocking program can resume at Willow Beach?
2. If the agency does not have the resources or any plans to appropriate money to fix the broken water supply line, will the agency allow for outside funds or donations to be used to fix the broken water supply line?
3. Once the water supply line is fixed or new infrastructure is constructed, will the agency reinstate the rainbow trout stocking program at the Willow Beach NFH and honor Deputy Director Guertin’s pledge under oath?
4. At the July 25th hearing, the Deputy Director testified that only four propagation programs have been discontinued since the beginning of fiscal year 2013. This contradicts two different numbers—one that was as high as 13—previously reported to the House Natural Resources Committee by the Fish and Wildlife Service. What is the actual number to date of propagation programs terminated?
5. Does the Fish and Wildlife service have any plans to terminate propagation programs or close hatcheries in fiscal year 2015 or the future?
6. A draft of the “Strategic Plan for the Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service” was leaked during the week of August 18th. Why did the Deputy Director not mention this draft or that you all were working on this comprehensive document when pressed at the July 25th hearing?
7. Did the Service work with States and/or solicit feedback from local hatcheries when drafting the August “draft strategic plan”? If so, please describe to what extent.

8. Does the service plan to do an economic impact statement or solicit public comment before implementing the August "draft strategic plan"?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. As always, I ask that this matter be handled in strict accordance with the existing agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Gosar
Member of Congress
Arizona's Fourth District

CC: The Honorable Benjamin Tuggle, Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Mohave County Board of Supervisors