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6-17-99
To Burkhardt
for Reply
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Little Rock, AR 72205

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Nashville, TN 37204

June 9, 1999

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The Honorable Bill Clinton
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500 - 2000

Dear President Clinton:

On behalf of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, we are compelled to write to you and Vice President Gore to respectfully request your attention to the budget needs of the National Fish Hatchery (NFH) system of the U.S. Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

These letters will also be followed up with telephone contacts from some of your friends in our two states who will seek to underscore the significance of this issue.

This issue is of immense importance to our home states, the southeast, and the nation. For example, it is estimated that the 37.5 million fish produced by **Federal hatcheries in 1994 generated an overall economic benefit of \$1.7 billion to the national economy** in association with the 18.75 million days of fishing opportunity and \$879 million in direct expenditures by anglers. The total NFH operations budget in 1994 was \$30.9 million.

Closer to home, the fisheries and aquatic resources of the southeast are associated with more than \$31 billion in economic output. The National Fish Hatchery operations budget for this Region in FY 1999 was only \$6.3 million, with five of the 15 hatcheries in this Region located in Arkansas and Tennessee.

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In Arkansas, ***Norfork and Greers Ferry NFH with a total annual operational cost of \$900 thousand in FY1999 produced 2.9 million trout, generating more than 773 thousand angler trips/year and \$50 million in angler expenditures to the state's economy.***

In Tennessee, Dale Hollow NFH supplies about 1.3 million trout creating fisheries in tailwaters and reservoirs for some 115 thousand trout anglers. Tailwater trout fisheries create about 632 thousand trips/year generating about \$30.5 million in angler expenditures. Erwin NFH in east Tennessee is one of several of the nation's brood fish facilities. These hatcheries play an important role in trout management throughout the nation by preserving unique strains of trout and annually providing eggs to hatcheries.

Understand that these hatcheries are not merely producing fish for put-and-take angling. There are at least 144 dams and reservoirs on streams and rivers of the southeast, most federal projects undertaken for flood control and hydropower generation. ***These federal dams have dramatically altered habitat and water flows, disrupted fish migration, and impacted water quality.***

In Tennessee, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Tennessee Valley Authority dams have altered about 1,500 miles of riverine habitat. The federal dams on Arkansas' White River have turned many miles of what was once a world-class smallmouth bass and warmwater fishery into a coldwater system incapable of supporting the native fish species. Trout, a coldwater species, which have been produced in NFHs and stocked in these waters have been partially mitigating the impacts of federal dam construction on these rivers by restoring some components of an ecosystem that would otherwise be devoid of most of its aquatic species. ***Thus, these mitigation fisheries and the production required to maintain them should be viewed as federal obligations.***

However, budget support has steadily been eroding from levels that were never truly adequate to maintain this federal mitigation obligation. In the Southeast Region of the FWS, hatcheries' operational budgets have only increased 3.3% in the last five years, a level inadequate to offset inflation. To make matters worse, the 15 NFHs in this region today have only been able to maintain current production levels as a result of the ***closure of 5 NFHs in 1996.*** In addition, in 1985 the FWS's ***second*** priority for its fishery program was ***"mitigation of fishery resource impairment due to federal water development projects"***; in 1994, a redefinition of priorities resulted in

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"fulfilling mitigation obligations" being only the **sixth** priority.

We respectfully encourage you to provide the funding necessary for the National Fish Hatchery system to fulfill these federal mitigation obligations, as well as address their other priorities, by increasing the Fish and Wildlife Service's NFH operations budget by \$10 million over current levels in the Administration's FY2001 budget. The Department of Interior will very soon be sending the FWS FY2001 budget proposal to the Office of Management and Budget. We encourage you to work with OMB to insure that this funding need is addressed in the FY2001 budget, and sincerely thank you for your consideration of the needs of this issue, so important to our home states of Arkansas and Tennessee.

Sincerely,



Steve N. Wilson, Director
ARKANSAS GAME AND FISH COMMISSION



Gary T. Myers, Executive Director
TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY



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