

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2014

The Honorable Daniel Ashe  
Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3359  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

As members of the Senate Western Caucus, we write to express our concern about the impact federal energy and environmental policies appear to be having on the National Fish Hatchery System (“NFHS”).

In March of last year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the “Service”) issued its *Strategic Hatchery and Workforce Planning Report* (“*Strategic Report*”), explaining that significant increases in “uncontrollable costs” related to energy and “higher environmental compliance standards” is impairing its ability to operate the NFHS.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the *Strategic Report* further indicates that the Service can anticipate reductions to National Fish Hatcheries in Montana (Ennis), Tennessee (Erwin), and West Virginia (White Sulphur Springs).<sup>2</sup> Recent months have borne out these concerns. For example, the Service cited budget constraints when it recently elected to terminate the 52-year old program at the Willow Beach Fish Hatchery.

In 1996, the Service took steps to address some of these issues, promulgating internal policies aimed at reducing “operational costs by efficiently and effectively conserving and reducing the cost of energy.”<sup>3</sup> At that time, the Service’s strategy focused on “[o]btaining lower utility rates” and developing renewable energy supplies. By the Service’s own admission in the *Strategic Report*, those strategies have failed. As the Willow Beach example has shown, the impact of higher energy costs and “increasingly restrictive” environmental compliance requirements appear to be pushing the Service away from meeting what it purports are core objectives of the NFHS—namely, “bolstering our nations’ fisheries” and “restoration of wild fish and other aquatic species.”<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to better address the detrimental impact of higher energy costs and restrictive environmental regulations, we would appreciate your perspective on the following questions:

- What energy and environmental compliance requirements are detracting from the Service’s ability to meet its full operational mission, including recreational fish stocking?

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. FWS, *National Fish Hatchery System, Strategic Hatchery and Workforce Planning Report* at page 6 (March 2013) (hereinafter, “*Strategic Report*”).

<sup>2</sup> See *Strategic Report* at 22.

<sup>3</sup> Energy Management and Water Conservation Originating Office: Division of Engineering, 373 FW 1 (March 14, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> *Strategic Report* at 27.

- What federal energy and environmental policy changes would enable the Service to better meet its operational mission?
- Why has the Service's 1996 energy management strategy failed to reduce costs? If the Service believes those energy policies have not failed, why has it been unable to better control energy costs?
- To what extent does the Service consider economic impacts when making strategic decisions (e.g., terminating the Willow Beach program) or developing energy and environmental policies (e.g., the 1996 energy strategy)?
- How does the Service plan to consult with local communities and interested stakeholders about these policies?

While we recognize that today's fiscal climate will require difficult decisions, we do not accept that those decisions should be driven by federal energy and environmental policies that are advanced at the expense of the NFHS's core mission. We thank you for your assistance, and we look forward to working with you. We appreciate your attention to this matter in accordance with all existing agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines.

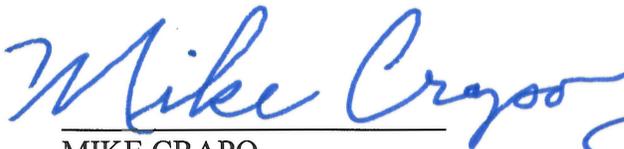
Sincerely,



JEFF FLAKE  
United States Senator



JOHN BARRASSO  
United States Senator



MIKE CRAPO  
United States Senator



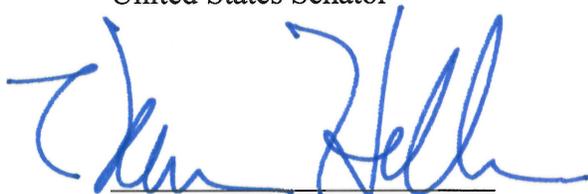
JAMES RISCH  
United States Senator



MIKE LEE  
United States Senator



ORRIN HATCH  
United States Senator



DEAN HELLER  
United States Senator