## Testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs

## on H.R. 5026 Fish Hatchery Protection Act

## By Robert Mansell, Chairman Arizona Game and Fish Commission

## July 23, 2014

Good morning Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to be with you today to share the perspective of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission on HR 5026, the bill authored by Mr. Gosar. My name is Robert Mansell a native Arizonan and the Chairman of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.

The Commission is a firm proponent of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation; our fish and wildlife belong to all Americans, and need to be managed in a way that their populations will be sustained forever. The financial backbone of this model of wildlife conservation is the hunter and angler who pay the freight for wildlife conservation through their license dollars and federal excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment.

The Commission has a vested interest in the future of the National Fish Hatchery System and what changes to that system could mean to our fisheries, recreational opportunities and state hatchery systems. According to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation commissioned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service over 636,000 people fish in Arizona, resulting in an estimated fishing expenditures of over 1.5 billion dollars annually.

Mr. Chairman, States, particularly in the West, have had a long standing relationship with the National Fish Hatchery System. The states rely on the production of federally cultured brood fish and sport fish to meet critical fisheries management and recreational demands. Many times fish must be produced in certain environments and in such a way as to meet mandates by the Service. We appreciate the difficult choices federal agencies must make given the current budget climate; however, the National Fish Hatchery System's trust responsibility is to ensure sufficient fish stocks for sport fishing purposes. This is not only important to Arizona and the nation's economy but is vital to many of the state hatchery systems across the Nation. In Arizona for example:

- Ennis National Fish Hatchery in Montana provides over 2 million triploid rainbow trout eggs annually to our state hatcheries.
- Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery along the Colorado River rears an average of 150,000 rainbow trout stocked in the Colorado River annually;
- Williams Creek and Alchesay on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona supply all of our Apache trout eggs annually stocked in the White Mountains for sport fish recreation.

Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery located along the Colorado River south of the Hoover Dam, operated by the Service is part of the National Fish Hatchery System built in 1959 has operated as a mitigation hatchery since its existence to produce rainbow trout for recreational purposes. On November 21, 2013 the Service conducted an emergency stocking of 11,000 rainbow trout when the low water levels compromised the delivery system of water to the hatchery. However, over 40,000 fish were lost due to a lack of water movement through the system that stemmed from a lack of infrastructure repairs.

Only after this emergency did the state become aware of the plans set in motion by the, then, soon to be released, *Strategic Hatchery and Workforce Planning Report*. At that time the Service informed the State that they would end all trout stocking efforts in perpetuity. Mr. Chairman, while a small operation, Willow beach served as ground zero for many States in discovering the Services "new priorities" established under this report. New priorities that the States were not consulted on and frankly, at least in Arizona, would not have found out about until much later except for the unfortunate incident at Willow beach where an infrastructure issue prematurely accelerated the Service's plans to end sport fish production.

Mr. Chairman, Willow Beach is just the tip of the iceberg. I flew here from San Antonio where I attended the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency's annual meeting. All across America, States are looking at ways to shore up their sport fish programs given the fallout of this report.

The States longstanding relationship with the National Fish Hatchery System is in peril. Cessation of sport fish production at federal hatcheries across the west will result in:

- Loss of a successful economic driver.
- Loss of recreational opportunities.
- Reduced ability to get youth and the public outdoors.

Mr. Chairman, According to the American Sport fishing Association, more people in America fish than play golf and tennis combined. If fishing opportunities are severely curtailed, many State and Federal agencies will have fewer tools to get youth and the public recreating outdoors.

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission appreciate Mr. Gosar's vigilance on this issue. We are supportive of the 10 year moratorium on National Fish Hatchery Closures and believe this will allow the Service and other federal agencies the opportunity to properly consult with States to come up with a viable alternative.

In Closing, Mr. Chairman we appreciate the attention you and others are devoting to maintaining and enhancing a system crucial to sport fishing and fishery conservation work across the country. We strongly believe that the States, anglers and the whole American public benefit from the good work of the national fish hatcheries. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective with you and I would be please to respond to any questions.