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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Chairman John Fleming
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
On Wednesday, March 05, 2014
1324 Longworth House Office Building Oversight Hearing on
The National Fish Hatchery System

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PENNY DODGE
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Good morning, today, the Subcommittee will examine the November 2013 Report issued by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on their vision on how our National Fish Hatchery System should operate in the future.

Before getting to that report, however, it is important to understand that Congress established this network of federal fish hatcheries 143 years ago to address seriously declining fish populations and to compensate for lost recreational opportunities caused by the construction of federal water projects. For over a century, these hatcheries have propagated tens of millions of fish which have been used to stock rivers, lakes and streams throughout America.

From its high in 1940, the number of federal hatcheries has declined from 136 to nearly 70 today. These facilities, which average more than 70 years of age, produce and distribute 140 million fish and 120 million fish eggs with a value of over \$5 billion each year. In 2011, recreational anglers took 69 million trips, they caught 345 million fish, supported 364,000 jobs and the recreational fishing industry contributed over \$70 billion to our economy.

Over the years, there have been some changes to the hatchery system including the enactment of the Mitchell Act of 1938, the transfer of a number of federal fish hatcheries to the states and the passage of the National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006. During that entire period, there has been an unwavering commitment to produce and distribute native and non-native fish for recreational purposes.

During the Obama Administration there have been new challenges including consistent budget requests for less money for the hatchery system and now the self-fulfilling report that indicates that even if funding is increased by five percent, recreational propagation programs will be terminated and Service employees will be re-assigned primarily from Southeast Region 4.

The State of Louisiana has one national fish hatchery, the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery in my district, which raises over 1 million recreational fish per year. For the past 83 years, this warm water hatchery has in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries provided millions of catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill and sun fish which have been used to stock public waters throughout my State.

During the course of this hearing, I intend to try to find out why the Service targeted hatcheries that produce recreational species? What is the statutory authority for simply deciding after nearly 150 years that the hatchery system will no longer mitigate for federal water projects? What is the definition of "fully reimbursed" and what input, if any, did the Army Corps of Engineers, the Bonneville Power Authority or the Tennessee Valley Authority have in determining their rate of payment?

Are there certain national fish hatcheries or propagation programs that could be conveyed at no cost to various states?

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