

TESTIMONY OF John Bowling, Jr.

Member of the White Sulphur Springs Rotary Club and **Friends** of the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, OVERSIGHT HEARING ON H.R. 5381, THE NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY SYSTEM VOLUNTEER ACT OF 2006

June 15, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am John Bowling, President of Bowlings Home Center in White Sulphur Springs, WV, and member of the White Sulphur Springs Rotary Club (WSS Rotary) and the *Friends* of the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery (WSSNFH). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding H.R. 5381, National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006.

The WSS National Fish Hatchery has served the community of White Sulphur Springs, the state of West Virginia and the nation since the turn of the 20th century. For over 100 years, the hatchery has provided economic, recreational, and educational services to the community. Indeed, the people of our community view this hatchery as their hatchery. Many community members recall how they used to visit and play at the hatchery when they were young. [During WWII, I remember the hatchery opening its grounds for church picnics and the big pond to local children for swimming in the summer and skating in the winter.] Thus, our community has a sincere and vested interest in not only maintaining the operational integrity of the hatchery, but also in enhancing the mission and role the hatchery plays in our city as a recreational and tourist destination.

The WSS hatchery is one of three disease-free rainbow trout broodstock hatcheries in the country, responsible for shipping and producing 8 million eggs per year. More recently, the hatchery expanded its role to include propagation and restoration of endangered freshwater mussels. Because of its location in the middle of downtown White Sulphur Springs (WSS) and its proximity to freeway entrances into WSS, the hatchery provides a unique tourism stop for thousands of visitors. Community members such as myself enjoy working with the hatchery in its mission to promote fishing and outdoor recreation in West Virginia.

Over the years, the hatchery has partnered with and received support from community groups and citizens to accomplish its goals. For the past 15 years, the WSS Rotary Club has co-hosted the Annual Fishing Derby at the hatchery, which is attended annually by approximately 400 children and their family members. In 2000, the WSS Rotary Club played a major role in organizing and producing the hatchery's Centennial Celebration. More recently the WSS Rotary Club and the newly formed *Friends* of the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery partnered with the hatchery to produce the Inaugural Freshwater Folk Festival. The festival was held on October 7, 2005 and was attended by over one thousand visitors from our local and neighboring communities.

I would like to report on a few of the activities that our *Friends* group and Rotary club would like to achieve but have been unable to perform due to liability concerns for volunteers working at the hatchery and limitations to fund-raising capabilities. These activities include a stream-habitat restoration project on Wade's Creek, which runs through the hatchery. This project will serve as a model of good stream habitat management practices and a demonstration for land owners of how to restore a degraded stream. Upon obtaining the necessary funds for planning and implementing the project, hatchery personnel, with help from volunteers, will install interpretive signs that discuss the importance of stream habitat restoration to water quality, and describe the engineering phases of the restoration effort. Additional projects we would like to implement at the hatchery include creating wetland habitat for migrating shore birds, installing walking trails and interpretive signs along the hatchery woodlands, and updating existing hatchery signs. Ultimately, the Rotarians, *Friends*, and the City of White Sulphur Springs would like to partner with the hatchery to create a cooperative visitor center focused on the cultural and natural heritage of Appalachia that would include an outdoor Aquarium of the Appalachians where visitors could walk and observe the life of a stream. Finally, support of this legislation would enable the *Friends* of the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery, which the Rotary Club played a role in creating and continues to support, to take over some of the duties that the Rotary Club has performed and move into new areas of interaction with the hatchery.

The National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act (Hatchery Volunteer Act) would provide necessary infrastructure and support for encouraging volunteerism at the hatchery, as well as facilitate the ability of Friends groups to raise and donate funds directly to Fisheries programs. The Hatchery Volunteer Act also would aid in the development of viable partnerships between non-governmental organizations and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The state of West Virginia has a large number of fishing enthusiasts and individuals willing to perform community service. We have many retired citizens that would welcome the opportunity to share their knowledge as well as learn from hatchery biologists, and thus perform docent services at the hatchery. The Hatchery Act would establish leadership within the Service for assisting our *Friends* group in recruiting new members and training volunteers. The WSS Rotary and *Friends* of the WSSNFH strongly support the

legislation and appreciate the leadership of this Committee and the co-sponsors in seeking passage of the bill.