

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Testimony on H.R. 5061, the Paint Bank and Wytheville National Fish Hatcheries Conveyance Act

House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans

June 15, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I first want to express my appreciation to Chairman Gilchrest and Ranking Member Pallone for inviting my testimony and for holding today's subcommittee hearing on H.R. 5061, bi-partisan legislation which I introduced with my colleague from Virginia Mr. Goode

H.R. 5061 would simply convey two federal fish hatcheries located in the towns of Wytheville and Paint Bank in my Congressional district to the State of Virginia for continued operation by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The legislation enjoys wide support and no opposition. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services as well as the State of Virginia both endorse the conveyance of these two properties.

The two facilities have been operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries since 1983 under a 25 year lease agreement. In the early 1980's the federal government was in the process of divesting some federal hatcheries which were not involved in mitigation activities. The Wytheville and Paint Bank hatcheries are used for recreation only - both facilities provide brook, brown and rainbow trout for the stocking of federal lands. At that time, Virginia expressed interest in operating the facilities under a 25 year lease agreement, and the State has been operating the facilities since that time. The lease is set to expire in 2008, and all parties are in agreement that a title transfer before that expiration is appropriate.

There are 6 salaried State employees and one wage employee at the Wytheville hatchery and 5 salaried and 1 wage employee at the Paint Bank hatchery. In addition, the two facilities have an estimated combined economic effect of \$40 million annually producing a combined total of approximately 290,729 pounds of trout during Fiscal Year 2005.

Since beginning operation of the facilities under the lease agreement, the State has made numerous investments in the two hatcheries. The State has invested approximately \$159,350 for improvements to the Wytheville facility and approximately \$230,000 at the Paint Bank facility. These improvements include renovation of a sewage treatment house, upgrade of gutters and down-spouts, construction of new roofs and windows and installation of boilers and generators.

In addition, during that time the facilities have been thoroughly tested for various contaminants, and there are now no contaminant issues associated with either hatchery. The State would like to continue operation and investment in the facilities for a variety of reasons. For example, in order for extensive capital expenditures or any federal funding to be used for additional improvements, the ownership must be transferred from the federal government. Given the fact that the State of Virginia would like to assume ownership and that the federal government has been making a broad effort to divest of non-mitigation related hatcheries, this conveyance makes a great deal of sense.

My legislation would simply transfer title of the Wytheville and Paint Bank Fish Hatcheries to the State of Virginia. Again, all parties are in agreement to this conveyance. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you again for holding today's Subcommittee hearing on H.R. 5091. Thank you.