

Testimony on HR5061 VA Hatcheries Transfers (Boucher and Goode)

House Resources Fisheries and Oceans Subcommittee

June 15, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Gary Martel Director of Fisheries for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. I appreciate your providing me with the opportunity to present testimony for our Department regarding H. R. 5061.

The Wytheville National Fish Hatchery located in Wythe County Virginia, and the Paint Bank National Fish Hatchery Located in Craig County Virginia have been operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) under a no cost 25 year Memorandum of Agreement since March, 1983. Prior to 1983 these facilities were operated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to provide trout for recreational fishing on federal property in Virginia and neighboring states. When given an option between closure and operational transfer VDGIF selected to take over the facilities and continue to provide recreational angling opportunity in federal, state and private waters in western Virginia.

DGIF incorporated the two hatcheries into our system and currently the two facilities produce over 40% of the trout stocked for public fishing in Virginia. The estimated economic impact of recreation provided by the stocked trout from these two facilities is over 40 million dollars per year utilizing figures from the 2001 U.S. Fish & Wildlife National Hunting & Fishing Survey and DGIF's Virginia Trout Angler Survey from the same year. The facilities located in rural areas currently provide employment for 13 individuals.

DGIF began working with USFWS in 1995 to convey ownership of the two hatcheries to Virginia. Both agencies have been in support of the transfer for more then a decade. The option of a renewed Memorandum or no cost lease is not desirable as both hatcheries are aging and in need of significant capital investment. Modernization and expansion of Paint Bank and Wytheville are part of DGIF's current long term plan for our Hatchery System. Transfer of the facilities is needed in order for significant capital investment by Virginia to occur. To date DGIF has provided repair and improvement funding to the facilities of approximately \$400,000.

DGIF has continued to provide trout eggs upon request to hatcheries in the federal system and in other states. The hatchery at Paint Bank is one of the only certified disease free facilities in the country. USFWS provides disease testing at DGIF operated facilities in exchange for certified eggs.

Passage of H. R. 5061 will have no cost impact on the state or federal budgets. Passage will however provide for the continued operation and improvement of the facilities. An independent consultant (Fishpro) was contracted by DGIF in 1995 to make system wide recommendations and estimate costs for renovation and upgrades. Estimates in today's dollars for needed renovation at the two hatcheries are placed at 4.5 million dollars. DGIF strongly supports the transfer as proposed in HR5061. Transfer of Paint Bank and Wytheville to VDGIF will insure long term recreational angling opportunity for trout in western Virginia and the continued operation of the facilities providing both trout and trout eggs to state and federal hatcheries.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and the committee for providing our Department with this opportunity to speak. We also would like to recognize the Service's efforts over the past several years in working to facilitate this transfer, and finally Congressman Boucher and Goode for introducing this legislation and supporting the transfer. If the Committee has any questions I would be glad to answer them.