

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs

Rep. Phil Roe
March 4, 2014
2:00 p.m.

Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan and esteemed members of the subcommittee.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before the Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs Subcommittee this afternoon on the National Fish Hatchery System. This topic is very important to my district, as we are proud to host the Erwin National Fish Hatchery in Unicoi County. The Erwin hatchery was established in 1894 and is an important part of the National Broodstock Program. Erwin serves as the primary broodstock facility for three strains of rainbow trout and produces between 13 and 17 million disease-free eggs annually. These eggs are then shipped to federal, state and tribal hatcheries to support their fishery management efforts. Additionally, the Erwin hatchery provides eggs to research centers, classrooms and universities around the country.

The Erwin fish hatchery and resulting trout stocking account for nearly 3,500 jobs and \$89.6 million in wage and salary income across the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Region. Each taxpayer dollar spent for trout production at hatcheries in the region leads to nearly \$73 in economic output. Last November, I was pleased to see that the Fish and Wildlife Service announced there would be no hatchery closures this year, but I was also troubled by its warning that closures might be necessary in Fiscal Year 2015. During these tough economic times, I understand and believe wholeheartedly that we all must do more with less, but it seems to me a program that sees a \$73 return on every dollar spent should be protected and prioritized.

The omnibus funding bill included important funding for these programs and, thanks to the leadership of Senator Lamar Alexander, includes a stipulation that none of the funding included in the Department of Interior's budget can be used to close fish hatcheries. There is also a provision in the Army Corps of Engineers budget that includes \$4.7 million to reimburse the Fish and Wildlife Service to continue to operate the Erwin and Dale Hollow facilities in Tennessee, as well as more than \$46 million to continue operations at every hatchery in the system as requested. The Tennessee Valley Authority has also worked with Fish and Wildlife to assist in providing the funds needed to continue hatchery operations.

While I am hopeful that FWS can obtain reimbursable agreements with the various agencies that benefit downstream from the Erwin fish hatcheries, I do not believe it would be prudent to eliminate funding for this program within the FWS until these agreements are signed. Fishing benefits a whole host of businesses and provides tourism dollars to many regions, so closure of fish hatcheries would be devastating to the economy in Tennessee and throughout the Southeast Region.

I hope Fish and Wildlife will continue to pursue partnerships with stakeholders and focus on creative ways to keep these programs up and running, rather than continuing with threats of closure each fiscal year.

I thank the subcommittee for holding a hearing on this important issue, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to preserve these hatcheries for years to come.