

February 28, 2019

Dear Governor Scott and members of Vermont's General Assembly;

Those signing this letter advocate for tens of thousands of hunters, anglers, and trappers in Vermont. For decades our license fees and federal excise taxes have supported the conservation, protection and restoration of countless species of animals, fish, birds, plants and their habitats. Some of these are the iconic Vermont species which are pursued for food and fur, and as a way of connecting to our landscape and to each other. Rare, threatened and endangered species have also been brought back from the brink in large part through these same funding streams.

We ask you now to, once again, allow us to put our money where our mouths are by funding the continued operation of the Salisbury Fish Hatchery. We understand, and share, your concern about the cost of living in our great state, and the impact on that of taxes and fees. However, in this case, we feel that closure of the hatchery to solve a budget crisis is short-sighted and we urge you to reconsider doing so.

A hatchery which supports a fishery for brook, brown, rainbow and lake trout in rivers and ponds which have not – at least not yet – been restored to a condition in which they can consistently produce wild fish may seem to benefit only anglers. However, there are some important ways in which the hatchery benefits all Vermonters, whether or not they ever pick up a rod.

First, the fish produced at Vermont State Hatcheries represent a significant economic driver for the state. According to surveys by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, fishing in Vermont generates \$131 million in economic activity in Vermont. Stocked fish alone represent \$31.6 million of this amount. It is important to note that because of the nature of angling, much of that economic benefit occurs in rural parts of the state. As one small part of this picture, funds from the sale of fishing licenses are also likely to be severely impacted by the significant decrease in stocking capacity brought on by the abrupt closure of Salisbury. These funds pay for Fish and Wildlife law enforcement, biological and other work, which benefits Vermonters who don't fish as much as those who do.

In addition, angling is one way to keep Vermonters connected to their waterways and engaged and committed to improving and cleaning up those rivers, streams, lakes and ponds. Without that direct connection to the water, the commitment Vermonters are making to clean water would be significantly less than we see today. Some of the fish which begin their lives at Salisbury, especially Lake Trout and Steelhead, are also an important part of restoring populations which we hope and expect will become self-sustaining over time.

Finally, fish hatcheries provide opportunities for tourism and scientific education in some perhaps unexpected ways. Nearly 15,000 Vermonters and visitors visit these hatcheries every year, including 6,000 at Salisbury. These visitors enjoy not only a fun experience but also the chance to learn about fish biology. These same hatcheries supply eggs for programs like Trout Unlimited's "trout in the classroom" project, which educates both teachers and students about fish biology and the importance of clean, cold water to the growth and the future of salmonid species including Vermont's state coldwater fish, the Brook Trout. Meanwhile, other programs like Barre Fish and Game's kids fishing derby, rely on this hatchery as well.

We are not ignorant of the other problem facing Salisbury, the impending water quality issue regarding its discharge. However, we are also aware that the permit issue at the hatchery is unlikely to become an immediate crisis, particularly if there is some plan or progress being made to address it. We will continue working with the Governor's Administration to develop a solution and understand that this cooperative communication between all parties will be an important piece of securing the long-term viability of the Salisbury hatchery.

In short, we understand the pressures on both the Executive Branch and the Legislature as well as the balance you are charged with striking among many competing interests. However, we would respectfully request that for our recreational economy, for the future of both fish and anglers in Vermont and in order to allow, at the very least, a more orderly and deliberative closure of Salisbury (if not a more permanent solution) that you delay any decision on the hatchery which will likely be irrevocable. And we stand ready to support that approach with our voices, and our wallets.

Sincerely,



Mike Covey  
Executive Director  
Vermont Traditions Coalition



Chris Bradley  
President  
Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs



James Ehlers  
Executive Director  
Lake Champlain International

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