

## Vermont Council



March 15, 2019

Comments to the Vermont Senate Committee on Institutions regarding the proposed closure of the Salisbury Hatchery, provided by Grey Hagwood, Chairman, Trout Unlimited Vermont Council

Good afternoon Chairman Benning and Members of the Senate Committee on Institutions.

The Vermont Council of Trout Unlimited (VTTU) is not in favor of abruptly closing the Salisbury Hatchery at this time as a cost saving measure. We support finding current and new revenue sources, including a modest increase in fishing and hunting license fees, to delay the closure of the Salisbury Hatchery to lessen the impacts on Vermont fisheries and on our education program, Trout in the Classroom.

Trout Unlimited is a nationwide conservation organization comprising more than 400 chapters and greater than 300,000 members, whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's cold-water fisheries and their watersheds. VTTU is a statewide organization consisting of five chapters of conservationists and anglers with a total of nearly 1,400 members within Vermont. Our members are passionate about the conservation of cold-water fisheries habitat, and proper management of wild and native trout and salmon populations.

TU has a very basic approach to our conservation strategy. We use the best available science to **protect** headwater spawning habitat for trout and salmon. We **reconnect** tributaries with their rivers to ensure resilience, and we **restore** waters where development has impacted trout and salmon and the opportunity to fish for them. Finally, we **sustain** our work on the ground by educating anglers and conservationists about protection of our natural resources and cold-water fisheries.

The proposal to close the Salisbury Hatchery will have a devastating impact on our Trout in the Classroom (TIC) education program. The TIC program is a partnership between VTTU, the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife, and 97 local schools here in Vermont in which a class is responsible for raising trout from eggs, learning about their environment and lifecycle, and then releasing the trout into the wild. TIC is crucial to the "**Sustain**" mission of TU because it helps educate our young people as to sensible conservation goals. It is a cross curricular, interdisciplinary program that can be used to teach biology, ecology, and math, and even writing. An important part of the program is the egg source, which in Vermont, is the Salisbury Hatchery. If the Hatchery closes, it is questionable whether other egg sources, including purchase from out of state, will be available to compensate for the loss of the Salisbury egg production. An abrupt closure of Salisbury will likely result in the suspension of TIC in Vermont schools and it may never recover, even when eggs became available from another Vermont Hatchery.

Generally, the closing of Salisbury Hatchery will result in a decrease in the amount of fish stocked in Vermont waters. Although VTTU does not support stocking where a healthy, sustainable population of wild trout currently exists, stocking is appropriate in some waters in Vermont that cannot sustain a

healthy population. These waters and their stocked fish attract the young anglers that are so important to expanding a Vermont population that enjoys fishing as recreation and a pastime. Further, in some waters, stocking is appropriate to re-establish populations of species that have historically been resident in our waters, such as Lake Trout and Steelhead. Closing the Hatchery will jeopardize ongoing efforts to re-establish these species in our waters.

Separate from stocking, the long-term viability of the Hatchery is a concern to VTTU due to the degradation of water quality in Halnon Brook resulting from effluent discharge from the Salisbury Hatchery. Data from the Vermont Department of Conservation Watershed Division monitoring site shows a significant degradation in the health of aquatic biota below the confluence of the intermittent Hatchery discharge stream and Halnon Brook. In the proposed decommissioning plan, the state acknowledges that insufficient treatment of effluent waste necessitates significant upgrades to remedy the impaired waters of both the intermittent Hatchery discharge stream and Halnon Brook.

VTTU asks that the Salisbury Hatchery be kept open, at least in the short-term, to allow the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife to solve this egg production issue and to plan an orderly and phased closure of the Salisbury facility, if required. To facilitate this, we support a modest increase in fishing license fees necessary to help with the costs of keeping the Salisbury Hatchery open. Going forward, we are committed to working with the Department to find creative solutions to solve this dilemma and ensure that TIC program success continues. However, the water quality impacts of current Hatchery operations may ultimately warrant the closure of the Salisbury Hatchery.

VTTU looks forward to working with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife on efforts to protect and restore our native and wild trout through regulation changes, habitat restoration, and protecting native Brook Trout and other wild trout populations from the impacts of stocking where a healthy and viable native and wild trout population already exists.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D.G. Hagwood", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

D.G. Hagwood, Chair  
Vermont Council of Trout Unlimited