

## **MEMBERS OF THE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE #5**

Testimony in OPPOSITION to proposed elimination of funding for the Kensington Fish Hatchery and the Pheasant Release Program

**FROM: EDWARD PARKER**

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Unfortunately, funding for the State's recreational fishing programs in general, and the hatcheries in particular, has become a recurrent problem for recreational anglers and the Department. The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has proposed hatchery funding cuts for the last several budget cycles and each time, the legislature restored the funding. Once again this year, OPM has proposed to close the Kensington Hatchery in order to save \$195,968.

The Kensington hatchery is unique in that it supports both the last Connecticut River genetic strain of Atlantic Salmon, and a unique strain of large Seeforellen Brown Trout, and is the source of juvenile trout and salmon for two very popular school programs: Trout Unlimited' "Trout in the Classroom" and the salmon in the classroom program.

The state's other two hatcheries -- Quinebaug and Burlington -- are at full capacity and cannot take on the continued propagation of the legacy strain of Connecticut River Atlantic salmon, the Seeforellens, or the production of trout and salmon eggs that are be used in the school programs.

The Pheasant Stocking Program has been very popular for Bird hunters for over 65 years. Once again, OPM is proposing to eliminate the program, in order to save \$152,000. Hunters who participated in this program paid \$210,000 in 2014 (license fees and pheasant tags) to fund the purchase and release of pheasants on state wildlife management areas throughout the state.

Historically, the General Assembly eliminated dedicated funds for fish and wildlife programs and moved the funds paid by hunters and anglers to the General Fund. In doing so, these funds are at risk for the kind of budget cuts that are proposed this year. Anglers and hunters are understandably frustrated and upset with the current funding model which requires that they pay license fees and excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment, only to see the programs that these fees and taxes fund, are cut in tough budget years.

Fishing and hunting programs are popular. They contribute to the states' economy, provide recreational and educational opportunities for Connecticut residents, and are also a significant revenue generator for the state. The Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis at UConn projects that for every \$1 spent on natural resources, \$38 in economic activity is generated.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to restore funding for the Kensington hatchery and the Pheasant program in the current budget. Closing the hatchery would result in the irrevocable loss of the Connecticut River strain of Atlantic Salmon, the Seeforellen Brown Trout, and the termination of the school programs. Eliminating the Pheasant program would eliminate the only opportunity for many hunters who have no other opportunity to hunt these game birds.