

April 21, 2013

Mr. Dan Ashe, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3359
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Ashe;

Your help is needed to permanently fund a critical component and proven key tool for the successful and effective management of our Great Lakes - the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's program of mass marking all stocked salmon and trout in the Great Lakes. This program provides us with a quality fishery management tool to best manage these lakes for maximum efficiency and sustainability, gauge progress toward native species restoration and maximize the best return on our investment for a sound economy and enhanced tourism.

The current program to mark salmon and trout in the Great Lakes is not sufficient to mark all stocked fish and is temporarily supported through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. We need your help to permanently fund the USFWS with a line item of \$5.5 million for this mass marking program. A similar program is operational in the Pacific Northwest, and a new permanent line item will offer our resource managers the key tool needed to astutely manage the Great Lakes economically with the greatest return on investment. We are asking for your help to assure this line item is included on a permanent basis in this upcoming budget and all future budgets.

The Great Lakes have been disrupted by fishery failures since the 1950s; if all fish stocked from hatcheries are not mass marked (coded wire tagged), it could happen again. There is a clear indication that another and possibly greater failure is indeed possible, so much so that all state and regional agencies recognize the necessity of this mass marking program for all hatchery-reared salmon and trout stocked into the Great Lakes.

The agencies that manage these important fisheries now have the challenge and opportunity to balance the number of salmon they stock with the number of prey available to maintain a stable and economically viable fishery. While state fishery management agencies and the USFWS hatchery program offer the funding and manpower to raise and stock fish and manage this fishery, they need federal assistance with the critical program of mass marking.

Listed below are key benefits of a permanently funded mass marking program to the Great Lakes region and the federal government, as well as important adverse effects from a lack of funding

Benefits of a mass marking program:

Support and sustain a \$7 billion fishery

Preservation of a \$12 billion boating industry

Enhancement of world class coastal and regional tourist destinations

High-value lakeside communities

A World-class fishery has replaced Rust Belt with Fun Belt

Essential to effective resource management

Essential to restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem

Essential to restorations of native lake trout program

More effectively manage lakes for sustainable carrying capacity

Natural reproduction of salmon and trout is accurately measured

Hatchery stocking is tailored to available prey base

Ability to measure progress toward rehabilitation of native fishes such as lake trout and Atlantic salmon,

Offers all agencies opportunity to measure biological and economic efficacies of stocking and hatchery programs

Recovery of specific groups of fish

Ability to identify strains or hatcheries that contribute to most fisheries and recovery efforts,

Mass marking is vital to continued interstate commerce

Enhancement for State and Tribal agencies that do their share by fish rearing, tag recovery and resource management

Without mass marking program capabilities:

Difficulty in effectively managing lakes for effective carrying capacity

Overstocking of the system may occur

Accurate numbers of fish produced through natural reproduction is unknown

Difficulty in effectively balancing predators with available prey

Inability to measure progress of rehabilitation of native fish stocks

Major downturns, or even collapses in the fishery, are often possible

Inefficient management efforts and use of tax dollars

Can we please count on you for your support for this critical program to aide in giving the Great Lakes the financial shot they sorely need?

Sincerely,

CC:

Senator Carl Levin
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Congressman John Dingell
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Senator Debbie Stabenow
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