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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

I would like to address the plans for a renovation of the Bobby N. Setzer state fish Hatchery. I am opposed to both the current hatchery, and any plans to renovate or increase production at the fish hatchery. Part of the permitting process is to demonstrate a need for the land use. As Western North Carolina has multiple private hatcheries located outside of Forest Service lands I do not see how NCWRC can justify its need for a hatchery on the Davidson River or any other place within National Forest lands.

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Furthermore, stocked fish are a plague upon wild and native trout and the ecosystems in which they thrive. Stocked trout are not designed (I use that word intentionally) to live in a riverine environment with the stresses and fluctuations that entails. They are designed to live and grow in a man made concrete raceway, and subsist on a diet of feed provided by their caretakers. They are designed to grow fast, feed aggressively, and as a side effect; die shortly after being placed into a natural environment. These are not rehabilitated wild animals, or wild animals at all. Placing stocked trout into a river is no different than placing cows and chickens on a wild landscape and expecting them to survive on their own. Perhaps even that is giving them too much credit.

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When placed into rivers and streams, these fish violate the carrying capacity of that system and stress all life living in that system ranging from wild and native fish to food sources such as aquatic bug life, crayfish, salamanders, et. al. The products the hatchery exists to produce are themselves a detriment to the health of rivers and streams.

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The hatchery itself is also a detriment to the Davidson river and its water quality. Hatcheries crowd domesticated fish into tight spaces making them vulnerable to the introduction and proliferation of diseases that can affect the wild and native populations within the drainage where they are located. This is possible even without a release of fish into that system. The Davidson, however, has a stocking program on the lower two miles of Forest Service land, and escapement from the hatchery has been an issue since it was first built in 1950. Recently, during tropical storm Fred a tremendous amount of stocked fish entered the Davidson River. If the Davidson is of high enough quality for trout production in a hatchery scenario, it is more than good enough for wild production. With the large escapement during tropical storm Fred the potential for disease, genetic pollution (via brood stock) and competition for resources was and is tremendous, and the effects of this disaster are still playing out in the river. To combat the high risk of disease in a hatchery setting workers must use antibiotics, antifungals and other medications. These medications pass directly through the hatchery and into the river below. I am deeply concerned about the impact these medications, given for the "health" of stocked fish, might impact the organisms within the river downstream.

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In the past, the Bobby N. Setzer Fish Hatchery also served as an education center. While it promoted the propaganda of stocked fish, it also provided a great deal of outreach and education for the citizens and surrounding community. With NCWRCs decision to remove the educational buildings, and greatly reduce the educational aspect of the area, I find little justification for a purely industrial operation in an area as special as Pisgah National Forest.

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Beyond the hatchery, the hatchery fish, and the direct impact they have on the downstream and upstream environment and organisms, I am more deeply concerned with the impact they have on people. NCWRC argues that the hatchery and the fish it produces helps to support the angling community, and the businesses that serve that community. While I cannot argue the amount of revenue that this program may bring to the area, and

businesses that serve the angling community; I can say as a member of the angling community, and an owner of a business that serves the angling community; that I am not a fan of a government subsidy for those businesses. Wild fish in our area and across the state provide more than enough opportunities for those anglers, and guides willing to pursue them. Stocked fish are a mitigation for a failure to protect productive rivers through regulation and management, and failure to restore unproductive rivers to a healthy and productive state. We, the angling community, are owed a reparation for past damages, but are instead given a pay off in the form of a facsimile. Stocked fish amount to a "theft of the angling experience."

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I would ask that anyone reading this letter and in a position to make a decision on this hatchery consider its impacts long term, not just on the water and the wildlife that exist within it, but more importantly the impact this has on the citizen. Pursuit of wild things, the challenge of wild things, and participation in the natural environment is essential to the physical, emotional, and mental health of the citizen. While the opportunities for this are abundant in North Carolina and Pisgah National Forest; its abundance is no justification for creating, promoting, and sustaining a watered down, plastic, more "accessible," and false version.

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A slim paperback, and a quick read is Anders Halverson's An Entirely Synthetic Fish. I would encourage those in a position of authority to approve or deny the permits for the fish hatchery to read it cover to cover before any final decision.

"catchable(hatchery) trout don't meet a demand, they create the demand for more fish." -trout biologist Robert Behnke

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Thank you for considering my comments,

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Heath Cartee
Pisgah Outdoors