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September 30, 2008

Commissioner Pete Grannis
NYS DEC
625 Broadway
Albany, New York 12233-1010

Re: Connetquot River State Park Preserve—Hatchery

Dear Mr. Grannis:

I am writing to advise you of information I have gathered regarding the Connetquot River State Park Preserve (CRSPP) hatchery and the decision of NYS DEC to shut it down.

I am one of the co-founders of the Friends of Connetquot and served as their President for a number of years before being elected to the Suffolk County Legislature and then the NYS Assembly. I brought Casting For Recovery (a group that hosts fly fishing retreats for women who are breast cancer survivors) who bring almost 100 breast cancer survivors to the hatchery and to fish the river two to three times a year. I have worked closely with the state over the years regarding many issues that pertain to CRSPP. I am aware of the many attributes that this 3400+ acre jewel possesses in our New York State Parks system.

As you know, the CRSPP Hatchery is of historic note. It is on the National Historic Registry as it was built in 1870 and was the second hatchery in the state and in the nation. In the past, the hatchery has supplied approximately 80,000 trout to various ponds and lakes throughout Long Island. The hatchery stocks the river with native brook trout and non-native rainbow and brown trout. The first hatchery constructed on the Connetquot River was established in 1870 under the auspices of the Southside Sportsmen's Club of Long Island (SSCLI), a fishing and hunting club for the wealthy. According to Harry W. Havemeyer's book, *Along the Great South Bay, "As early as 1820...visitors from New York would come to take a stand on the river and cast for trout or in the fall hunt for deer or fowl."* It has been on the National Registry of Historic Sites since 1973. The Southside Sportsmen's Club accumulated 3,473 acres by the time it sold the premises to the state in 1963. In 1973, it became a state park and in 1978 was officially designated as New York's first State Park Preserve. Many of the buildings are more than a century old and it contains a Grist Mill that was constructed around 1750 and operated until 1878. The Friends of Connetquot are in the process of restoring the Grist Mill to a working mill.

As you know, the park is a haven for wildlife watchers. As the former President of Great South Audubon Society, I spent many years birding throughout the park. Additionally, I presently serve as the Co-Chair for the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses in New York State. I am a passionate advocate for recreational fishermen and women.

Connetquot is a haven for anglers. The River, which is fed from the aquifer, is pure and unpolluted. Only fly-fishing is permitted, continuing the tradition from the sportsmen's club days. Visitors come to CRSPP as a destination fishing site from all over the world: France, Sweden, England, Japan, Italy, Peru, Australia and many, many other countries. Connetquot is one of the premier fishing locations in the world, not just in the State of New York.

Unfortunately, your agency has made a decision to close the hatchery because of IPN virus at the facility—without completing a thorough evaluation and investigation. According to my research, IPN is not a communicable disease to humans; there is no known threat to humans who handle or consume the fish; we don't know when it started or how long it has been around; we don't know where it came from; it has been detected in many countries in the world and is endemic in some 40% of trout-rearing facilities in the United Kingdom but is not considered a serious problem at those hatcheries; it is not a reportable disease in U.K. trout farms; the discovery of IPN at Connetquot has had little- to-no discernible impact on the successful propagation of all three major trout species at the hatchery. The virus is transferred vertically and horizontally and characteristically occurs in rainbow trout, brook trout, brown trout, Atlantic salmon, and several Pacific salmon species. The main transmission is through eggs, feces and semen by contact through the water route and by ingestion of infected material. Fish-eating birds and animals carry the virus (seagulls, osprey, herons, kingfishers, eels, raccoons, etc.), with no apparent illness to themselves. IPN has been recovered from several species of aquatic invertebrates, including crustaceans and shellfish. It affects fry and fingerlings and occasionally, larger fish. IPN has been detected in saltwater fish also. ***There has been a steady and consistent mortality rate of approximately only 15% in the hatchery for the past 60 years, thereby stymieing any intelligent person as to why the NYS DEC wishes to close the hatchery.*** Furthermore, the hatchery stocks trout to the Nissequogue River in Caleb Smith State Park and has done so for decades, yet the fish have not been contaminated with IPN at that park.

Connetquot boasts approximately 300,000 visitors annually, the hatchery being the major attraction. Closing the hatchery will destroy any ability to remain on the National Historic Places Registry. There are normally 12,000-13,000 fishing sessions conducted in the Preserve each year. As we all know, New York State is in a fiscal crisis. Parks have been known to be the "step-child" of the budget in past years and as a member of the Assembly's Tourism, Arts & Sports Development Committee and a member of the New York State Assembly, I can assure you that the millions of dollars that it would cost to replace the hatchery to abide by the federal government's water pollution act, would not be in any budget—at any point—in the future. More than a million New Yorkers hold state fishing licenses. Sportfishing is healthy to the state's tourism industry—contributing an estimated \$1.4 billion annually to the state's economy.

Our Connetquot hatchery is a large revenue-producer. Anglers will not pay for unproductive fishing. Visitors will not pay to see empty tanks in the hatchery. It is my fear, and the fear of thousands of Long Islanders who love the park and understand the value of the hatchery, that this DEC action is suicidal to the future of the Connetquot River State Park Preserve. Closing the hatchery without good

science is certainly not conducive to the mission of the NYS DEC. PCB's have been detected in hatcheries throughout New York State, yet you have not closed these hatcheries. According to your website, you make available—fish, wildlife and marine resources guidance documents, but I find no reference to steps that should be taken when IPN is detected in fish. I believe this was a reckless decision, made in haste and made without good reason. I am requesting that you revise this decision, based on the importance of recreational fishing to our sportsmen and women, our economy, science, the future of the park, and many of the logical and sound points I have indicated in this letter.

I implore you to rethink this determination and work over the next two years with the professionals, the experts, and those who can evaluate and assess the situation. I ask that you allow for public debate and review of the science and work with all of us to come to a more sensible solution or alternative to the circumstances. While this two year moratorium of the closure is ongoing, fish can be raised and kept *within the park only*—no fish being brought into the park and no live fish leaving the park, while the investigation and conditions are explored and scrutinized.

I look forward to discussing this further with you.

Sincerely,

Ginny Fields
New York State Assembly
Fifth District