

**Friends of Connetquot
PO Box 472
Oakdale, NY 11769**

October 31, 2008

Commissioner Carol Ash
Office of Parks & Recreation
Agency Bldg. 1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12238

Dear Commissioner Ash,

New York DEC has made a terrible mistake by not renewing the license required by NYS Parks to continue operations of the Connetquot River State Park Preserve Trout Hatchery. The Connetquot Trout Hatchery is one of the most successful and historic hatcheries in the State having operated successfully for over 144 years. The Hatchery is an historic and educational gem that is the highlight of the Connetquot Park experience for as many as 250,000 visitors per year including bus loads of school age children.

I believe that I am in a unique position to analyze the DEC decision and the ramifications. For the past nine years I served as Chairperson of the Friends of Connetquot, a not for profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the Connetquot Preserve. During my nine year tenure as Chairperson of the Friends of Connetquot, the Friends raised over \$500,000 in grants and donations including the monies required to design and install the fire suppression system for the Main Club House, a historical structure dating back to 1820.

My resume also includes undergraduate degrees in Biology, Geology and Environmental Studies from Williams College. One of my most influential professors and mentors was NYSDEC Commissioner Tom Jorling. After Williams I attended the University Of Tulsa College Of Law where I earned a JD with a focus on natural resource Law. I am a member of the Bar in NY and Oklahoma and have been a member of the Suffolk County Bar Association Environmental Law Committee for many years.

I caught my first brook trout on a dry fly on the Connetquot when I was eight years old. Since that time I have fished the River over 200 times. A past President of the Oakdale Sportsmen's Club, I remain an avid fisherman with a resume of world class catches and releases including three International Game Fish Association World Records taken on a fly rod in the estuarine portion of the Connetquot River and Great South Bay.

Infectious Pancreatic Necrosis (IPN) is a virus that only affects juvenile trout. IPN is not harmful to humans.

Even if all of the fish in the Connetquot were destroyed, there is no guarantee that IPN would not be reintroduced in a short time from muskrats, raccoons, rats, possums, gulls, egrets, osprey and eels all of which have constant access to the River and all of which may carry IPN along with oysters, clams and other fish in the Connetquot estuary.

Closing the hatchery at this time may be a violation of the SEQRA. Closure may have significant impact on the entire Connetquot River and Connetquot estuary ecosystem including Osprey.

If the hatchery license is revoked there is no guarantee that the hatchery can ever be reopened due to the potential conflict between current regulations and the status of the hatchery on the National Registry of Historic buildings. Closure may violate the deed and grant creating the Preserve, thereby jeopardizing the very existence of the Preserve. The DEC has argued that “the hatchery is a 19th century hatchery being operated in the 21st century”. This is precisely the point! So are the Main Club House circa 1820, the Grist Mill circa 1740 and all of the other buildings at Connetquot!

Approximately 230,000 visitors log into the Connetquot Preserve and almost 80 % of those visitors go to see the hatchery. No one is going to pay to see empty concrete ponds. Few anglers will pay to fish and not catch. It makes no sense to intentionally reduce the Preserves revenue stream, especially considering our State budget crisis. Plans for a new hatchery that rely on well water would involve complex and expensive permitting, design and construction issues. The probability of the State coming up with an acceptable design and the funding to operate a new hatchery any time soon is minimal. Replacing natural stream flow with pumped water is an expensive environmental step backwards. Yearly operating costs would skyrocket with massive pumps running 24 hours a day.

There is no downside to allowing Connetquot to operate as an isolated hatchery and fishery, with no fish brought in and no fish shipped out. Allowing the hatchery to operate would allow for public debate and considered review of the science, financial and operational alternatives. The DEC claims that they have no choice due to the existing Regulations, this is not true. DEC Regulation 188.1 specifically provides that a permit can be issued at the discretion of the DEC even if the hatchery has tested positive for IPN.

I urge you to confront the DEC in an effort to save the Hatchery. The day it closes a tremendous public asset representing enormous educational and historic value will have been lost.

Best Regards,

Richard H. Remmer