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Mr. Daniel Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
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JUL 22 2013

Dear Director Ashe,

The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (Council) submits the attached report, *Strategic Vision for Fish and Aquatic Resource Conservation in the Fish and Wildlife Service: A Partnership Perspective (Vision),* for your consideration. This effort, undertaken at the request of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in October 2011, provides a partner-based perspective for a renewed vision for fish and aquatic resource conservation in the FWS.

The Council anticipates this report will be used by the FWS in implementing a reinvigorated program for fish and aquatic resources conservation. We also expect that the FWS will consult with the Council and the broader community on how this *Vision* is being implemented. The Council recognizes that the FWS, by mandate, professional abilities, and the expectations of its stakeholders and partners, provides a set of essential services for the conservation and management of the nation's fish and aquatic resources. The various federal, state, and tribal programs addressing these resources cannot be viewed in isolation - they rely on one another and are successful only when integrated, not pursued separately. The *Vision* demonstrates the critical nature of FWS efforts to collaborate with and, where appropriate, lead the shared efforts of states, tribes, and other stakeholders and partners in conserving America's aquatic resources.

Having reached out to many FWS partners and stakeholders in completing this effort, it is apparent to the Council that the larger natural resources community views healthy fisheries and aquatic resources as keystone elements of healthy ecosystems, and as opportunities for the public to utilize resources for recreational and cultural purposes. It is equally evident that the nation's water resources are essential to all FWS responsibilities, including those supporting waterfowl, threatened and endangered species, and the National Wildlife Refuge System. While the agency's mandates for fish and aquatic resources are many, collectively they point to the need for the aquatic resource activities within the agency to be strengthened and reinvigorated.

The *Vision* was developed with the assistance of a steering committee of stakeholders, partners, and FWS staff. The groups represented on this committee reflect the broad universe of interests that the FWS works with on a daily basis to conserve and restore the fish and aquatic resources of our nation. After months of tireless work, the committee has provided a thoughtful, comprehensive report.

The Council makes four observations that we will use to frame discussions with FWS staff at subsequent Council meetings.

> 1. Engagement: FWS and FAC Program leadership must engage stakeholders and partners in ongoing dialog concerning the strategic focus of the FWS in aquatic conservation. The Department of the Interior and the FWS should fully consider this Vision's findings and: 1) report back to the SFBPC at future meetings on how they are implementing the findings and recommendations, and 2) undertake a stakeholder and partner engagement process as they move forward in reinvigorating the aquatic conservation programs of the FWS.

2. Collaboration: A collaborative approach to fish and aquatic resource management is the most effective strategy to deliver on-the-ground conservation results. The current suite of programs in the FWS and FAC must represent an integrated conservation delivery system that supports ongoing partnerships between the FWS, states, tribes, and other stakeholders and partners. Regrettably, the FWS has failed to consistently support ongoing, expected, and agreed-upon fisheries services to its stakeholders and partners. FWS activities such as the Aquatic Animal Drug Approval Partnership, maintenance of partnership capacity at Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices, and delivery of brood stock hatchery egg production are critical pieces of the national aquatic conservation system. The SFBPC looks for clearly demonstrated FWS support for these important services that FWS provides to state and tribal stakeholders.

3. Leadership: Conservation and management of fish and other aquatic resources are core responsibilities of the FWS, influencing program management throughout the FWS. Therefore, FAC must be viewed and positioned as a keystone program within the agency. Stronger leadership must be demonstrated within the FWS on behalf of aquatic resource conservation. FAC's support for collaborative programs with state and tribal stakeholders must be clear and vibrant. Such forward-thinking leadership is essential for the FWS to achieve its broader goals of sustainable fish and wildlife in functional landscapes, and increased participation by Americans, especially youth, in fish and wildlife-related outdoor activities such as recreational angling and boating. Leadership is difficult to quantify, but the SFBPC and FWS's stakeholders and partners will look for leadership to be demonstrated through your proactive engagement to identify and address conservation priorities of shared interest.

4. Funding: Fiscal resources commensurate with the need for aquatic conservation actions, as determined through a partnership-driven dialogue, must be identified and requested by the FWS. Requisite funding and staff capacity are critical in the ability of the FWS to move forward in positioning itself to effectively address new aquatic resource conservation challenges. The SFBPC recommends that FWS and FAC leadership work with its partners and stakeholders to develop program priorities, and then undertake a funding initiative to address those priorities.

We request a meeting of Council representatives with you to discuss key aspects of the *Vision*. A similar letter and meeting request is being provided to Secretary Jewell.

Thank you for your willingness to utilize the Council in critically important efforts such as this *Vision* for aquatic conservation. Your engagement with us and other stakeholders and partners is representative of the successful approach to aquatic conservation efforts being implemented across the United States. The Council welcomes the opportunity for a continuing dialog on your actions to implement recommendations made here and in the *Vision*, and we look forward to discussing this matter with you in person. Please feel free to contact either myself or Mike Nussman, Council Fisheries Issues Committee Chair, to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

Chairman

Attachment

Cc: SFBPC members
David Hoskins, AD-Fish and Aquatic Conservation
Betsy Hildebrandt, Chief of Staff
Matthew Huggler, Acting AD-External Affairs