



U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General

FLASH REPORT



**Fish and Wildlife Service:
Jackson National Fish Hatchery
In Need of Immediate Action**

C-IN-FWS-0009-2007

MAY 2007



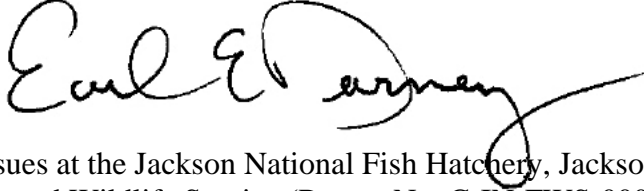
United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Washington, D.C. 20240

May 8, 2007

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary, Fish, Wildlife and Parks

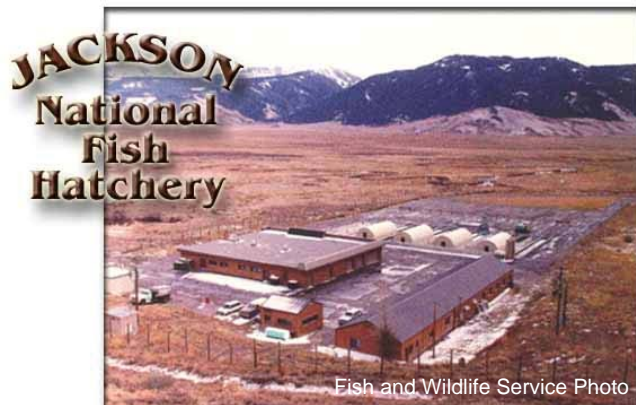
From: Earl E. Devaney
Inspector General 

Subject: Employee Safety Issues at the Jackson National Fish Hatchery, Jackson, Wyoming, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Report No. C-IN-FWS-0009-2007)

This report describes conditions at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Jackson National Fish Hatchery (Hatchery) that require immediate action to protect the lives of employees working in the Hatchery buildings.

We visited the Hatchery in January 2007 as part of our audit to determine if the Department and bureaus have effectively identified, prioritized, and mitigated health and safety issues related to maintenance of their constructed infrastructure that could affect employees and the public. Although we have not yet completed this audit, we wanted to immediately bring to your attention serious health and safety deficiencies we identified at the Hatchery.

We found that Service employees and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) biologists are working in unsafe buildings at the Hatchery. The fish production and equipment buildings were condemned and closed to the public in September 2000, after a seismic evaluation revealed structural deficiencies so dangerous as to require the buildings to be either permanently evacuated or demolished and reconstructed. In addition, the roofs on each of these Hatchery buildings could collapse under heavy snows. Service employees were told to move their offices to a trailer in September 2006, but continue to work in the fish production building to meet their responsibilities for trout production demands in the Federal, State, and Tribal waters of Wyoming and Idaho. The Hatchery is used to rear and restock endangered trout that are lost as a result of federal water development projects. Today, after nearly 8 years, visitors cannot enter the Hatchery buildings, yet employees still work in them, and the Service has made little progress in replacing the condemned facilities.



Background

Four employee houses, a trailer, several buildings, and indoor and outdoor fish tanks are located on Hatchery grounds. The original Hatchery buildings were constructed in 1958. Service staff working at the site consist of four full-time



The Teton County zoning requirements for snow load for the region is 85 pounds per square foot (psf). The equipment building trusses were designed for a 30 psf snow load, far below County standards.

employees and a volunteer. USGS also rents space at the Hatchery for two biologists, who work in the equipment building that has been retrofitted as office space and a laboratory to test for contamination that could affect fish.



The Jackson National Fish Hatchery buildings appear to be structurally sound, but behind the wood siding is unreinforced masonry block that crumbled during tests for seismic strength.

Unsafe Conditions at the Hatchery Buildings

From the exterior, the buildings appear well kept and structurally sound. However, the interior walls, constructed of unreinforced masonry block, are marred with structural cracks. In addition, seismic monitors are attached over the cracks to measure the movement of the walls.

In 1997, Hatchery staff were inside the buildings when the shock of an earthquake, centered 70 miles away, caused the walls to sway. When tested, all the walls failed the acceptance criteria outlined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The extent of the deficiencies revealed by 1999 seismic evaluations was such that the buildings could not be rehabilitated. The Service therefore determined that reconstruction was the only cost-effective method that could ensure the safety of employees.

The roofs also show no visible sign of disrepair, but roof collapse warnings have been issued to the employees since neither of the Hatchery building roofs were designed to withstand the heavy snows that can be experienced in Wyoming. In fact, the roof of a National Park Service building—the Moose Visitor Center for the Grand Teton National Park—located about 8 miles north, did collapse under heavy



Fish and Wildlife Service Photo

This fish production flat roof was not designed to withstand the heavy snows that occur in Wyoming. Employees continue to work in the building although a roof collapse warning was issued.

snows in 1995. Although that roof had lasted 26 years, it ultimately failed.

In 2006, Service employees were ordered out of the buildings, except on a "limited basis." However, to meet their responsibilities to rear and restock trout, employees must enter the buildings frequently on a daily basis to feed the fish and maintain the fish tanks.

"Until a new building is constructed, employees and visitors at the Jackson National Fish Hatchery should be warned that these roofs could collapse under certain circumstances . . .

. . . Immediate evacuation should be carried out if the building makes any creaking sounds."

*— Service Seismic Safety Coordinator
August 2000 Roof Collapse Warning*

Therefore, both Service and USGS employees continue to work in the condemned buildings, nearly 8 years after the buildings were declared unsafe and identified as a high priority by the Service because of its "exceptionally high risk" ranking.

This situation occurred because the Service did not follow through on the results of the 1999 seismic evaluations and its decision to replace the buildings. The Hatchery buildings were originally to be replaced by the year 2005, until a series of events culminated in the project being removed from the Service's 5-year Construction Plan (Plan) in 2003. Because of the serious liability represented by the identified

hazards of the Hatchery buildings, the project was reinserted into the Plan in 2004. The planning phase was scheduled for completion in 2005 with construction anticipated to be complete in 2009. However, project funding to replace the Hatchery buildings continues to be delayed and employees have continued to work in the condemned buildings since 1999.

Our auditors were provided a memo that indicates funds were provided, then rescinded, and subsequently requested to be reprogrammed to the Hatchery project. Based on discussions with the Service, we are unable to determine the actual status of the Hatchery project. As shown in the chronology (see Appendix), the Service is not committing the necessary resources to ensure the health and safety of employees at the Hatchery.

From 1999 to the present time, employees have continued to work in the condemned buildings . . .



The aquarium exhibits within the fish production building have been closed to the public for 8 years.

Conclusion

Given the history of this project's planning and design and the delays for funding construction of replacement buildings, we are concerned for the health and safety of Service employees. It is imperative that the Department and the Service take immediate action to mitigate the health and safety issues at these Hatchery buildings.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Assistant Secretary require the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to:

- 1. Protect the lives of DOI employees by prohibiting access to the unsafe buildings.*
- 2. Ensure that resources are made available so the Jackson National Fish Hatchery and storage buildings can be designed and constructed.*

This flash report is being issued to notify both Departmental and Service management of serious health and safety issues that we found so that immediate action can be taken. Our Department-wide audit report will address the overall issues that led to these health and safety deficiencies. The Department-wide audit is being done in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Please provide us with your written comments to this report and a summary of actions taken or planned by **June 8, 2007**. Please address your response to:

Ms. Anne L. Richards
Assistant Inspector General for Audits
U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Inspector General
1849 C Street, NW, MS 5341
Washington, D.C. 20240

If you have comments or questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 208-5745.

Appendix — Chronology

- 1999** Experts recommend the danger posed by the buildings is such that they must be evacuated and that the most cost-effective solution is to demolish and reconstruct the buildings.
- 2000** The Hatchery and adjacent equipment buildings were condemned and closed to the public.
- 2001** Project listed on the Service Plan to replace the unsafe, condemned Hatchery buildings with estimated completion in 2005.
- 2002** Hatchery project remains on the Service Plan to be completed in 2005.
- 2003** Hatchery project was removed from the Service Plan due to (1) confusion whether the Hatchery was a mitigation facility, (2) Service-wide construction funding being reduced, and (3) a heavy wildfire season that resulted in the regional office using Hatchery project design funds to repay fire suppression costs owed to the Bureau of Land Management's Wildland Fire Management Account.
- 2004** Region's appeal to re-list project into the Service Plan is granted.
- 2005** A memo to the Director, dated May 31, 2005, states that the Service had received \$354,420 in 2001 and another \$79,480 in 2003 for seismic safety of the Hatchery buildings. The memo further requests to reprogram \$100,000 from another hatchery in South Carolina to the Jackson National Fish Hatchery. This reprogrammed amount would be used to provide temporary office space and relocation of the fish production activities and enable the resource program to continue, while significantly reducing the safety risk to the employees. Lastly, the memo states that the Construction program was severely impacted by the transfer of \$399,000 of Hatchery project funds to repay the Wildland Fire Management Account.
- 2006** Employees ordered out of the buildings, except on a "limited basis." A listing of Health and Safety projects for the Service, dated November 2006, reports that the design phase of the Hatchery buildings was completed in 2006.
- 2007** Planning or construction funds have not reached the field office. The Service's Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement Plan indicates that \$451,759 has been appropriated to date. As of March 2007, planning had not started and no funds had been received.