ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

July 26, 2007

Honorable Michael Johanns
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. David Anderson
Associate Director
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Johanns and Mr. Anderson:

Recently a new fish virus, Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia Virus Isolate 4b (VHS), has established itself in the Great Lakes region and has caused widespread fish mortalities in a range of species from the State of Wisconsin to the State of New York. The virus has continued to increase its range since the first disease outbreaks were documented in 2005 and these large-scale mortality events continued in 2006 and 2007.

This emerging threat to both the wild fish populations and to the aquaculture industry has sparked a wide range of preventive responses to slow its spread to the rest of the United States and Canada, including the issuance of an Emergency Order by USDA-APHIS. We are also aware that USDA-APHIS took the appropriate steps to request emergency funds for surveillance and developed a bi-national Surveillance Plan with Canada to document the locations that this disease, an OIE reportable disease, is located. Given the demonstrated need and potential significant adverse economic impact to local economies, we urge that both of you assiduously seek to secure the necessary funding for required national VHS surveillance by the appropriate federal and state agencies.

We wish to emphasize to you that the additional VHS surveillance information is absolutely essential to the fight against this disease. These data allow aquacultural facilities, along with state natural resources and agricultural agencies, to put into place appropriate and properly scaled biosecurity and regulatory measures. It is simply impossible to properly develop and implement disease control measures including disease zonation without knowing where the virus is located and its seasonal cycle of prevalence. The lack of funding places our country at risk from the rapid spread of this disease, particularly into the globally important catfish and trout aquaculture facilities in the Southern and Western United States, easily creating the conditions for other countries to embargo our fish products. The lack of funding for proper surveillance also means

that duplicative domestic regulations, likely disrupting interstate movements of fisheries products, will cause anglers and the aquaculture industry a great deal of confusion. The additional surveillance work that is required to properly evaluate spatial and temporal distribution of this virus is far beyond the resources currently available to the state natural resources and agricultural agencies. Federal emergency assistance is absolutely critical to the efforts to control this disease while it is still in its early stages of dispersal.

We sincerely urge both of you to redouble your efforts to secure emergency funding for VHS surveillance, a critical tool in the control of this virulent pathogen. The money spent in the short term on surveillance work will greatly reduce the longer term costs of control and regulation that otherwise will be implemented without sufficient information on this pathogen.

If you have any questions on this issue, or there is anything else that we can do to assist you in this effort to secure funding, please contact either of us. We are available at any time to meet with you on this important national fish health issue. Thank you for your sincere attention to our request.

Sincerely,

Matt Hogan
Executive Director
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Gordon Robertson
Vice President
American Sportfishing Association