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Environmental radicals control federal agencies

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The Las Vegas Review Journal's [Dec. 1 front-page article](#), "Hatching a survival plan," was presented as a potential environmental triumph by writer Henry Brean. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is just the continuation of a wrong-headed, maybe-we'll-get-lucky program that started in 1967.

The program to save the Devil's Hole pupfish has cost the American taxpayers many millions of dollars, with no results. I think it is time to take a step backward and objectively view the Devil's Hole pupfish program for what it is.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (previously known as the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife) was founded in the late 1800s to support the nation's hunters and anglers.

It did a great job of doing that until the 1970s, when the environmentalist philosophy set a new course for the organization. The concept of fish and wildlife biologists working to provide recreation to American sportsmen was changed to environmental protection and endangered species.

The Endangered Species Act was sold to lawmakers with visions of majestic bald eagles and mighty grizzly bears. Never once were they shown a weed or a moth and told that private property owners could lose the right to use their land if these species inhabited their property. And so, since 1967, Fish & Wildlife has spent big money to protect the Devil's Hole pupfish, a fish that no taxpayer will ever see and a fish that has absolutely no environmental importance.

Under the watchful eye of Fish & Wildlife, the endangered pupfish population has gone from a high of 544 fish to a recent low of 35. What a success story! Now, in the continuing comedy of errors, the service has worked with the University of Arizona to spend \$4.5 million to construct a hatchery, at an annual operating cost

of \$250,000, to save the pupfish. The \$4.5 million came from the sale of federal land. How was this project judged as the best way to spend these funds?

Might it have been better spent providing recreation opportunities for Nevada sportsmen? Citizens might ask why the \$4.5 million wasn't spent to build a facility with a viewing window at a museum so taxpayers could at least see firsthand how their tax dollars are being misspent.

While this is going on, Fish & Wildlife hatcheries across the United States with budgets far less than \$250,000 produce fish to provide recreation to citizens. They are being threatened with closure because the agency says it doesn't have the money to keep them operational.

Unlike the pupfish program, some of these hatcheries produce endangered species to promote recovery programs that are biologically sound. The American sportsmen, through license payment and use taxes, have provided tens of millions of dollars to purchase wildlife habitat and support recreational programs. Fish & Wildlife sees itself as too scientifically sophisticated to provide common people with outdoor recreation.

A realistic management strategy for the Devil's Hole pupfish is to make sure it has an environment and then let it be. The fish have the biological potential to make it on their own. There is no cost-benefit analysis attached to the Devil's Hole pupfish management effort. It is all cost and no possibility of any benefits. It would be sad, but not the end of the world, if the fish don't make it. The money could be better spent providing recreational programs for the American people.

Since its inception, the Devil's Hole pupfish recovery program has been a scam on the American people. It still is, and it just keeps going and going. Please help me understand the justification of spending \$250,000 per year to keep alive a few fish in a desert hole.

The sportsmen who pay the bills deserve more consideration than a remnant population of a few fish that, unfortunately, are on their way out.