5640 Portage Drive
Wasilla, AK 99654
aktn@gci.net
December 24, 2009

Representative Wes Keller
600 E. Railroad Avenue
Wasilla AK, 99654

Dear Representative Keller:

I am a retired ADF&G fisheries biologist, commercial fisherman and one of your constituents. I and various active and retired ADF&G biologists are requesting your assistance with legislation to name the new Elmendorf fish hatchery after the man who pioneered the fish rearing and hatchery program at the Ft Richardson: William Jack (Bill) Hernandez (biography, photos, news clippings and draft bill attached). The Elmendorf hatchery is under construction and is scheduled to be completed in May of 2011. I have written Representative Dahlstrom and Senator Dyson, who represent Elmendorf AFB, to sponsor legislation to name the hatchery after Mr. Hernandez.

Mr. Hernandez was a remarkable man who was a Wake Island civilian POW during WWII, enlisted in the U.S. Army after liberation, and, in 1957, while a sergeant in the Army, started the fish rearing program at Ft. Richardson. He ran the fish rearing facility for 11 years, with annual production reaching 12,000 catchable-size rainbow trout, 100,000 Chinook smolt and 200,000 coho smolt. Bill retired from the Army in 1968, and I was appointed to be his successor at Ft Richardson. Bill left huge "shoes" to fill. There was no hatchery at the site then but rather the pond was segregated into three areas for rearing fish. Two old Quonset huts served as living quarters, warehouse, office and lab. Trout were stocked in lakes on military land as well as Anchorage area lakes. Salmon smolt were released into Ship Creek, and returning adult salmon contributed to the commercial and sport fishery. Bill often worked seven days a week, with limited assistance from ADF&G or Army personnel. Bill was not immune from other duties regularly assigned to NCOs, and he spent one night a week as duty NCO at HQ Co. Bill was a busy guy! After Army retirement, Bill worked another 15 years as a fish culturist for ADF&G at the Fire Lake Hatchery and the new hatcheries on Ft. Richardson and Elmendorf AFB.

Sadly, Bill died of cancer in 2003. Without his drive and dedication, the fish rearing project at Ft. Richardson would have never gotten off the ground and the hatchery there probably would have never been constructed. He made an enormous contribution to Anchorage sport fishermen and Cook Inlet commercial fishermen. Please honor William Jack (Bill) Hernandez by helping with this legislation.

Respectfully,

Tom Namtvedt

Representative Wes Keller

January 25, 2010

Mr. Tom Namtvedt
5640 Portage Drive
Wasilla, Alaska 99654

Dear Mr. Namtvedt:

Thank you for your letter regarding a recommendation to name the Fort Richardson Fish Hatchery after Mr. Hernandez. Based on the historical account, the concept of fish hatcheries in Southcentral Alaska must truly be attributed to his efforts.

I am joining you in suggesting to Representative Dahlstrom that she sponsor legislation to name the soon to be completed Elemdorf fish hatchery after William Jack (Bill) Hernandez. I will join her as a co-sponsor of that bill. I am asking her, as she serves as the Representative for Elemdorf Air Force Base.

Again, I would like to thank you for bring this information to my attention. It is important to honor those who throughout our history have done the work that makes Alaska what it is today. Obviously, Mr. Hernandez is one of those pioneers who should not be forgotten.

Sincerely:

Wes Keller
Representative
District 14

Cc: Representative Nancy Dahlstrom

During Session (January - April): Alaska State Capitol • 120 4th Street, Juneau, Alaska 99801 • (800) 468-2186 • Fax (907) 465-3818
During Interim (May - December): 600 E. Railroad Avenue, Wasilla, Alaska 99654 • (907) 373-1842 • Fax (907) 373-4729
Representative.wes.keller@legis.state.ak.us • www.housemajority.org

William Jack Hernandez

William Jack (Bill) Hernandez was born in Los Angeles, California on April 30, 1920 and died Aug. 31, 2003 in Wasilla. At the age of 21, Bill was employed by Morrison-Knudson Construction Co. building fortifications on Wake Island. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, he and other civilian contractor personnel were assigned to assist the Marine detachment defending the Wake Island. On Dec. 23, 1941, Wake Island was captured, and Bill was imprisoned in various POW camps in China. He survived an escape attempt, breaking his ankle while jumping from a train. He was subsequently recaptured, and this is described in several books on the battle of Wake Island, perhaps most notably "Jim's Journey: A Wake Island Civilian POW's Story" as well as a History Channel documentary: "Wake Island: Alamo of the Pacific."

After the war, Bill returned to California enlisting in the Army in 1947. He initially served as a foreign language interpreter, and his early military career took him to Korea and Europe. Bill honed his chess skills and became a Chess Master. At one point, Bill defeated Japan's top chess player. In 1956, his unit was transferred to Fort Richardson, where he became a Fish and Wildlife Conservation NCO. His orders were to rehabilitate the lakes and streams on post. In 1957, after several months of negotiating with the military and others, Bill received a letter from the Secretary of the Army approving a cooperative agreement between the Army, the Alaska Territorial Department of Fish and Game and the Fort Richardson power plant which allowed the plant's cooling pond to be utilized for rearing fish. Bill ran the fish rearing project, and annual production reached as high as 12,000 catchable-size rainbow trout, 100,000 Chinook smolt and 200,000 coho smolt. Bill retired from the Army in 1968 and received an Army Commendation Medal for his efforts: *"Through his perseverance, ingenuity, and scholarly research, he conceived and pioneered a process of rearing rainbow trout, silver salmon and king salmon from the fingerling stage to the migratory smolt, and in addition, accelerated the restocking of post and community lakes and streams.* ***By virtue of Sergeant Hernandez' diligent efforts coupled with his high sense of responsibility, the military conservation program in Alaska received successive official and recorded recognition by the State Legislature of Alaska and by the United States Senate.*** *His invaluable service to the military and civilian communities of Alaska earned him the worthy respect and admiration of all with whom he came in contact."*

Shortly after his Army retirement, Bill was hired by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as a Fish Culturist at the Fire Lake Hatchery. He returned to Ft Richardson a few years later to manage the large scale hatchery constructed at the cooling pond. Bill also worked at the Elmendorf hatchery. In 1983, after 26 years of dedicated service raising salmon and trout, Bill retired again.

Bill then purchased a boat and fished commercially for seven seasons in Bristol Bay. When not fishing, Bill spent his time at his cabin on Lake Susitna and groomed snowmobile trails in the area. He was a member of the Wake Island Civilian Survivors Association, a Mason, and a Cooperative Weather Observer for NOAA. Though Bill never married, his many friends and dog Peggy were his Alaskan family. He was loved and respected by everyone who knew him.

Bill was buried in his native California, close to his twin sister Jewel with whom he shared a special bond. The Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7665 honored him with a 21-gun salute. **Bill Hernandez was the epitome of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation".**

We Alaskans

The Anchorage Daily News Magazine

April 17, 1983

- Satch: Ah, graft and corruption!
- Ski to Sea Relay: Fast, frantic fun
- General Delivery: Preparing for spring

Harvest days at the hatchery

Story by Andrew Perala / photos by Paul Brown

Bill Hernandez walks down the narrow steel pathway as he has for years, sideways and backwards, methodically pushing and pulling on the 10-foot aluminum pipe that is the business end of a powerful industrial vacuum cleaner.

The walkway is mounted on top of a six-inch-thick wall that separates two long, narrow fish ponds called raceways — two of the 20 raceways at the Elmendorf State Fish Hatchery, site of one of the greatest concentrations of rainbow trout in the world. Each walkway is 80 feet long by 10 feet wide and holds a single species of fish at a certain stage of growth. 8,000 fat adult rainbow trout in each tank at the east end, hundreds of thousands of finger-length silver salmon in the pond below Hernandez' feet.

Hernandez tugs at the 100 feet of blue hose trailing behind him and guides the head of the vacuum cleaner back and forth along the concrete bottom. The four-inch hole at the end swoops through a brown mix of fish food and fish excreta. The chore is performed weekly.

"It's not natural for the rainbows to jump from one pond to the other," says Hernandez. "But if a rainbow were to jump into a fingerling pond, well, we wouldn't have to feed him anymore."

There are more than a million fish in the Elmendorf hatchery, part of a carefully orchestrated plan to manipulate nature, to get maximum yield.

The six-year-old facility is Fish Heaven on Earth, a piscatorial stud farm where hefty rainbows eat, sleep and procreate their lives away.

This year the hatchery, located just off the Elmendorf Access Road near Ship Creek, will produce 500,000 king salmon, 500,000 silver salmon and 5 million rainbow trout eggs.

From 5 million eggs come 2½ million fingerling survivors released in 140 lakes from Fairbanks to Kodiak.

All the Elmendorf fish are part of a plan to sate, at least temporarily, the appetites of Alaska sport fishermen.

More than 150,000 rainbow trout are released within the boundaries of the Municipality of Anchorage each year. Few, if any, rainbows caught within city limits come from fish that are not hatchery-raised. Although there are no firm figures on how many hatchery-bred rainbows are caught statewide, officials say they probably make up the majority.

Delivering the small fish is not a job for the Postal Service. Where there are roads, flatbed trucks with 400-gallon tanks drive to the edge of the water and pour out the fingerlings. In more remote areas, fish are air-delivered. Converted crop-duster planes and helicopters with modified forest-fire buckets drop the fish directly into the lakes.

Released each spring, half of the rainbows survive their first winter, having grown to seven and eight inches by then.

Although the canneries made several efforts early this century to hatch salmon eggs, the first rainbow hatchery started in 1952 when several sportsmen planted trout eggs in Fire Lake near Eagle River. But that effort amounted to little more than a few dedicated sport fishermen tossing eggs into the lake.

It was Hernandez who was responsible for the the first large-scale hatchery in the state.

Hernandez came to Alaska in 1956 as a military policeman at Fort Richardson assigned to the wildlife detail. In 1968, he says, the Army Corps of Engineers worked with local federal officials to build a small fish hatchery on Fort Richardson. Current Fort Richardson Hatchery Manager Gary Wall offers a slightly different account. "Bill had this wild idea that the warm water from the power plant could be used to raise fish. Nobody believed him, so he went and did it himself. It took a couple of years for it to work, but then he got the hatchery he wanted."

Hernandez ran the hatchery from the early 1960s until last June. When his 20-year military kitty ended in 1968, he took a month off, then started working for the state at the same location.

"When Bill was the manager at Fort Rich," says Darryl Kiefer, the Elmendorf hatchery manager, "you couldn't keep him out of the ponds. Unlike some managers who sit in their offices all the time, Bill had to be hands-on with the fish."

Hernandez admits he probably views fish differently from most people, probably with more recognition and respect.

For the past few weeks he has been waist deep in rainbow trout, right in the thick of the annual rainbow egg harvest in the hatchery raceways.

Fish are scooped up in long-handled nets.

The half-dozen hatchery workers dress in heavily insulated waders and wool clothing, standard attire for fish farmers.

Hernandez wears a baseball cap, a bright yellow rain slicker, insulated waders and gloves. An unlit cigar juts from his mouth as he heads for the raceway.

He attacks his work with vigor. When not scooping fish, Hernandez keeps track of the processed fish by jabbing the pencil onto the keys of a mechanical counter.

Conversation waits until after hours, when he and Kiefer play chess. In two years, they have played more than 100 games. The win-loss columns in the series is roughly equal. Both men, still clad in work clothes except for the boots that lie in the mud-room, move the pieces quickly, stopping only to fill glasses with Pepsi or to talk about fish. Sometimes Hernandez mentions his experiences as a Japanese prisoner of war in China during World War II, adventures that will be the topic of a book someday, he says.

The rainbow egg-harvesting process is simple enough. All the rainbows are herded into a separate section of the tank that is partitioned off. An anesthetic is sprinkled over 40-gallon tubs of water. Fish handlers stand waist-deep in the raceways.

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A hatchery worker injects oxygen into a female rainbow to aid in expulsion of her eggs.

hatchery

Continued from page 9

scooping up a few fish at a time in long-handled nets.

The nets are emptied into the tubs with a wild splashing that is stilled as the tranquilizer, called MC-222, takes effect. The drug tranquilizes voluntary muscle action without affecting the involuntary muscles, so a fish can breathe through its gills but cannot lift a fin to save its life.

Each fish is picked up by two hands. A gentle squeeze to the middle of the gut confirms the fish's status. Eggs will protrude from the underside of a ripe female. Males will squirt clear liquid or white milt.

Females with eggs are passed into a tub next to the doorway of a tent covering a length of the raceway. Males are transferred to a penned-off area at the far end of the raceway. Inside the Quonset-shaped tent two handlers work steadily.

One holds the fish upside down while the other picks up a metallic device shaped like a common garden hose nozzle. A brown hose trails off into the water and is attached to a large green cylinder of the same oxygen hospitals use. There is a trigger on the nozzle device and, at the end, a short, thick needle that looks as though it could fill a basketball. The needle is sharp, though, and a quick jab into the fish's body cavity just behind the dorsal fin produces no blood.

With a pull of the trigger, oxygen at low pressure flows into the fish, gently forcing out the bright orange eggs in a steady stream that spills into a round plastic tray. The eggs are checked to see if the color is normal and if there are any genetic mutations. Occasionally, bad eggs will be dark or green.

At one time eggs were harvested by squeezing the sides of the fish, a process that damaged the eggs and hurt the fish.

While one worker pours the eggs into a larger bucket, another tosses the rainbow into a penned-off section of the raceway inside the tent. The fish slips into the water like a limp torpedo and lies still for a minute or two, gills working in gulps. The constantly flowing water soon washes away the paralyzing drug. With little flicks of the tail and a few turns of the head, the fish rights itself and surges off into the distance.

Forty fish contribute 1,200 to 2,000 eggs apiece. The eggs are disinfected to kill germs from human contact and given to another worker for fertilization.

The process is quick. With the male fish held firmly in one hand, the handler squeezes a white stream of milt into the bucket. Unlike females, most males die after contributing to the genetic pool. It is the same in the wild. There is no natural reason for male fish to live another winter. Although winter water temperatures dip to as low as 34 degrees, virtually stopping all feeding and movement, the low oxygen content in the lakes would not support larger fish populations.

Elmendorf is able to function year-round as a hatchery because it receives from an Air Force generating plant a constant supply of 83-degree waste water that is piped half a mile to the hatchery. There it is mixed with Ship Creek water and brought to a stable temperature.

The temperatures are constantly monitored and alarms sound if there is a variance of more than a few degrees. Rainbows cannot live in water above 62 degrees without suffering from a killing form of stress. For salmon, the disaster brink is several degrees lower. Rainbows live in 42-degree water in the winter and 46-degree water in the spring when spawning.

Of the 19 fish hatcheries and rearing facilities in Alaska, Elmendorf is the only one that handles brood stock rainbow, the fish from which we get more fish. Other hatcheries trap wild salmon in streams and collect the eggs for rearing.

There are approximately 18,000 of the dark, fat trout in three raceways at Elmendorf, ranging in age from 1 to 4 years.

Watching thousands of them rolling in the water can arouse even the most casual fisherman, but catching these hand-fed beauties would be quite a trick.

An eight-foot-high chain link fence surrounds the property. Inside, eight large white plastic dishes create invisible barriers just inside the fence. Cross their line of fire and a shrieking alarm goes off outside the office and inside the newly constructed manager's house just a hundred yards away.

Casting a long line over the fence wouldn't work, either. A 20-foot moat of land separates the fence from the tanks. Reaching the ponds would be simple enough, but dragging a fighting trout overland and flipping it over the fence would be all but impossible.

There is more science than meets the eye inside the hatchery. Besides the electronically controlled warm water system, there is food that would captivate the most jaded readers of junk food wrappers.

Back in the 1940s, the early days of fisheries science, fish at hatcheries Outside were fed chopped cattle guts. Seemed like a good idea at the time. It was a waste product, the fish ate it voraciously, and it appealed to people who thought all that came from cattle was good.

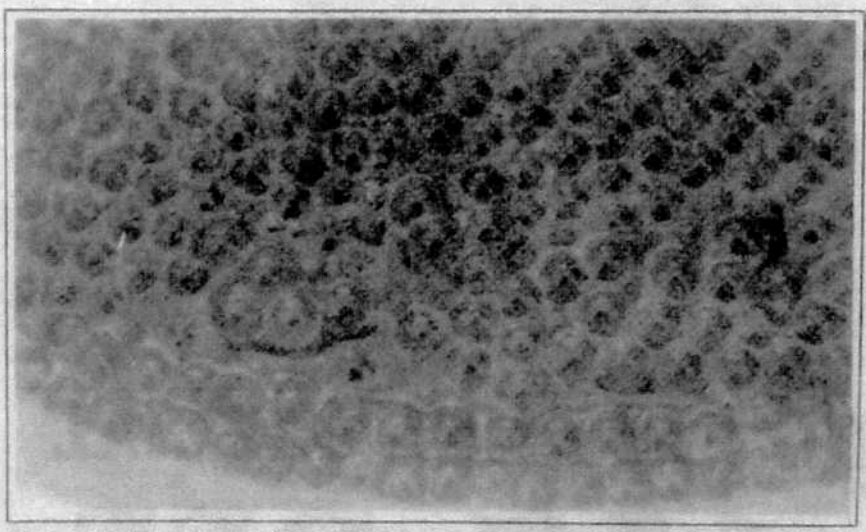
But the diet soon caused epidemic disease and many early hatcheries were closed.

Today, fish food is a science itself. Bagged in 50-pound sacks like dog food, the Oregon mash used at Elmendorf contains 22 ingredients ranging from fish meal to vitamins. An abundance of herring oil makes the pellets soft. Mature fish are fed at least once a day and consume, Hernandez says, about 1 percent of their total body weight daily. Young fish are fed more often, up to seven times a day. The Elmendorf hatchery uses 700 pounds of fish food daily in the peak spring season.

Although he had the opportunity to advance in the Department of Fish and Game hierarchy and the later bureaucracies that came to control the hatcheries in Alaska, Hernandez never pursued those career avenues. This summer, after working more than 25 years for others in the handling of fish, Hernandez will harvest fish on his own. With his 32-foot boat, the Hernando I, he will head out into Bristol Bay in search of king salmon.

A home computer will help him keep track of catch rates, fish locations and feeding patterns. But out on the rolling bay, Hernandez will use his own instinct, gleaned from years of experience, to catch fish.

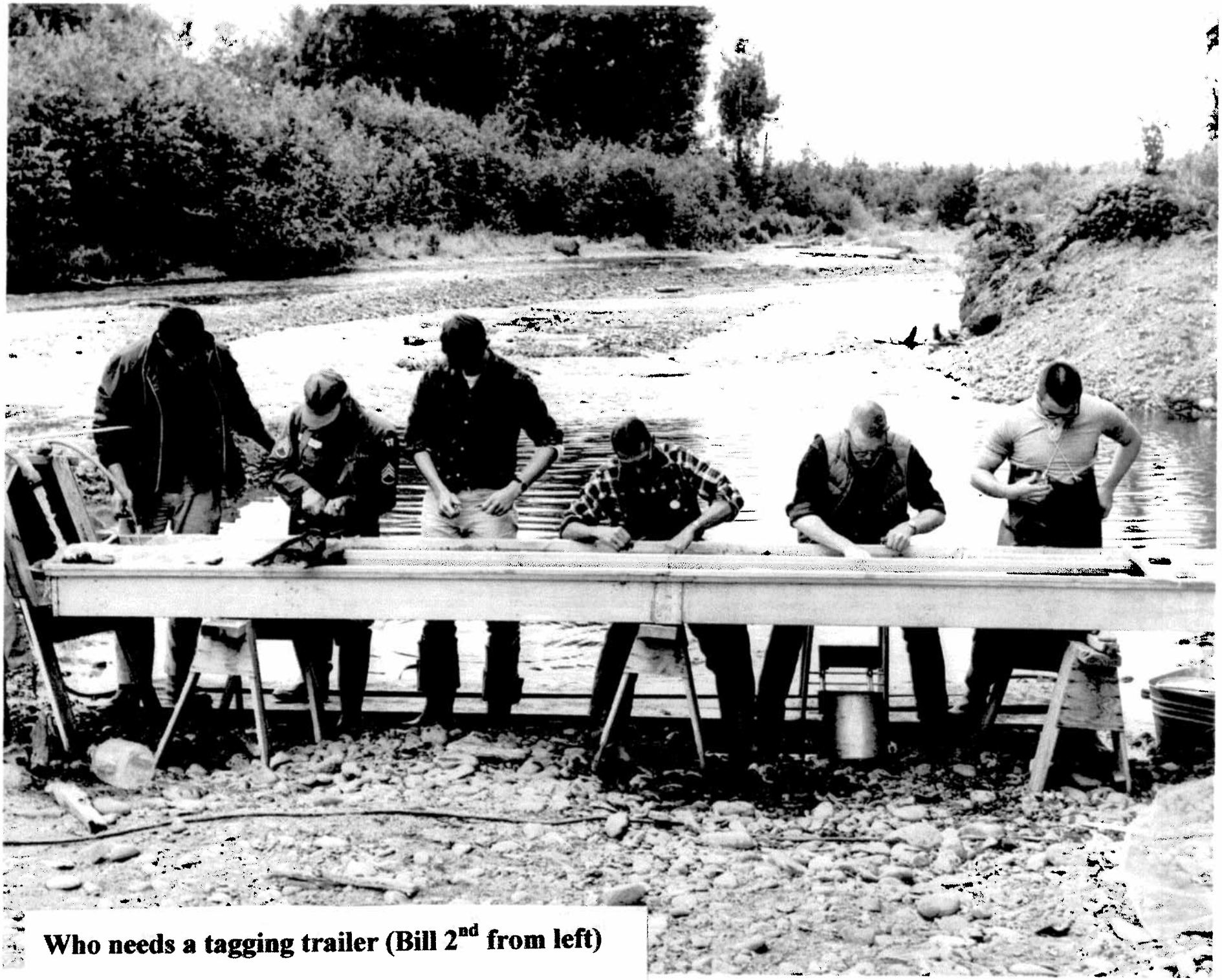
Bill Hernandez cradles the last fish he will handle at Fort Richardson. Now he plans to catch fish for himself.



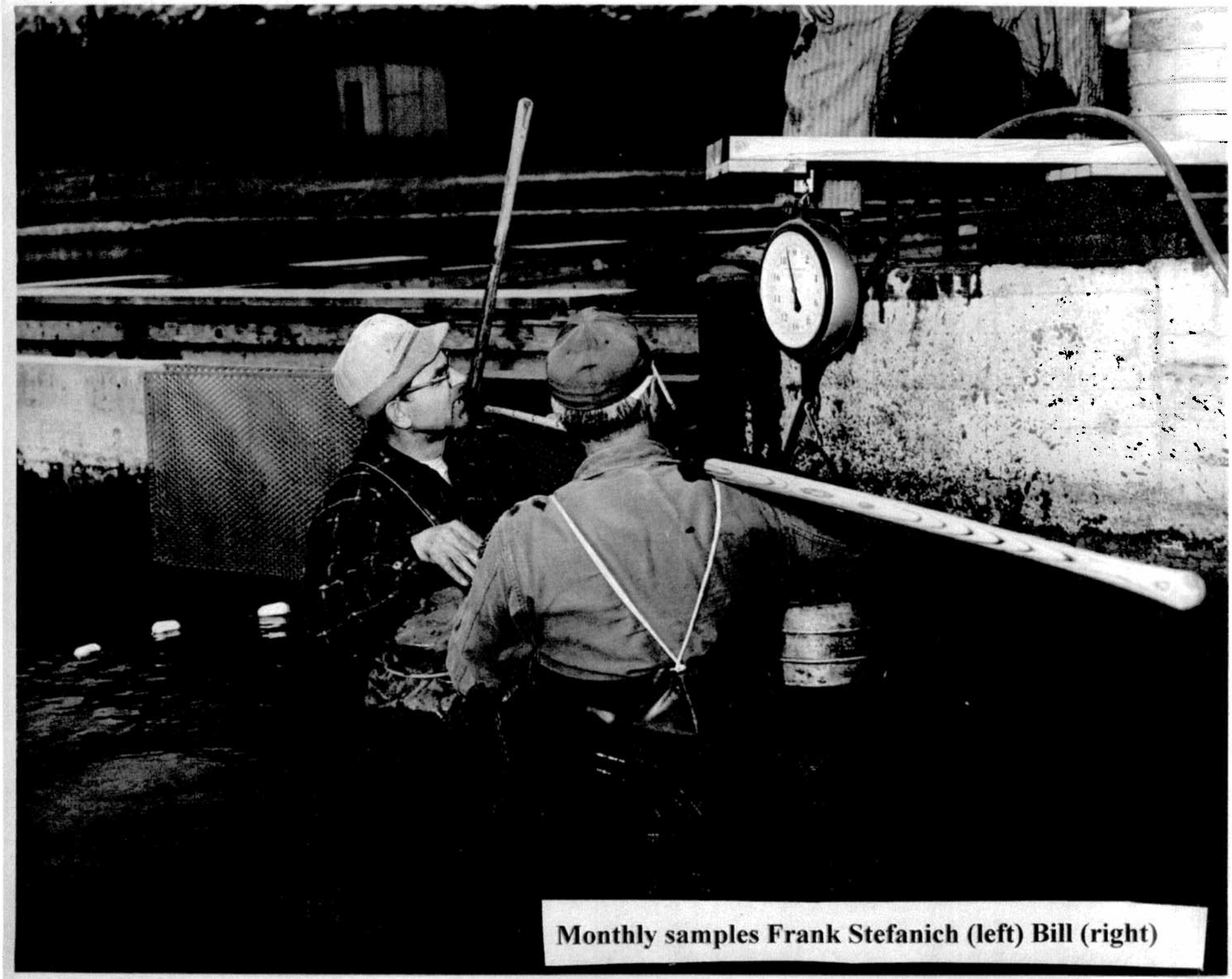
This year the Elmendorf hatchery will produce 5 million rainbow trout eggs.

☐ Andrew Parala is a reporter for The Daily News.

We Alaskans April 17, 1983



Who needs a tagging trailer (Bill 2nd from left)



Monthly samples Frank Stefanich (left) Bill (right)