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July 15, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

This letter expresses concern regarding the delay in Fiscal Year 2025 funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). These funds, which were supposed to be obligated by July 1, 2026, have not been released. These dollars are critical for the State of Michigan and the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) in their fight to protect the Great Lakes from invasive species.

Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) is awaiting \$806,428 for their invasive red swamp crayfish management project. The funding was supposed to be received on May 1, 2026. Since the red swamp crayfish's initial 2017 invasion in Michigan, the MDNR's work has been essential for suppressing their populations, mitigating their impacts to native species, habitats, and infrastructure, and advancing robust adaptive management for this invader within the entire Great Lakes region. The state has become a global leader in red swamp crayfish management but relies extensively on federal GLRI support for the program.

The delay in Fiscal Year 2025 GLRI funds has already impacted the MDNR's ability to conduct red swamp crayfish management and resulted in the MDNR stopping all federally funded invasive crayfish control efforts in May 2026. Any further delays will have severe long-term implications for Michigan's red swamp crayfish program. The MDNR and their partner Michigan State University will be forced to lay off five full-time staff. This would result in the loss of capacity to conduct red swamp crayfish response, control, monitoring, and research activities in Michigan. In turn, the species would spread unchecked across the Great Lakes region, increasing future control costs, and reducing the feasibility of future management efforts.

The Great Lakes Commission (GLC) is awaiting \$933,809 for four projects that were to begin January 1, 2026. Instead, the projects --- the Regional Great Lakes Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Landing Blitz, the eDNA Inland Lake Pilot Project, the Great Lakes Watercraft Coordinated Data Sharing Pilot, and the next phase of regional coordination of outreach and engagement with the bait industry --- are all on hold because funding has not been received. Without this funding, GLC is unable to support their staff

working on AIS issues and unable to address priority AIS issues identified by Great Lakes states across the entire region.

The Regional Great Lakes AIS Landing Blitz project works with representatives from all eight Great Lakes states to strengthen invasive species prevention efforts through small grant programs. These grants allow volunteers to go out to their local boat ramps to teach boaters and other recreators about the risks of spreading invasive species and the best practices they can take to protect the lakes they love. Over \$150,000 goes to local partners to support states with the greatest need for additional boat inspection and outreach efforts. Without this small grant program, states lack the capacity and ability to provide consistent outreach, education, and boat inspections to recreational boaters, increasing the risk of AIS spreading into new waterbodies.

Another way that GLC battles invasive species is through their work to address introductions via bait. Their project to develop and produce a regional baitfish identification guide in collaboration with numerous partners across the Midwest is a critical effort to engage with the baitfish industry on preventative practices to best protect the Great Lakes region. Without the next phase of funding that was expected, GLC is unable to continue their outreach efforts and unable to produce the baitfish guide that was requested by state partners.

One of the largest projects that GLC's Fiscal Year 2025 GLRI funding supports is the eDNA Inland Lake Pilot Project. This project aimed to set best practices for eDNA surveillance within inland lakes that a national effort could build on to expand to improve the efficiency of early detection and rapid response for aquatic invasive species. Many invasive species are difficult to track early in their invasion, and eDNA technology provides a highly sensitive approach to surveillance but needs more refinement before being rolled out at a larger scale. GLC and their partners on the project have already hired staff through planned awards to Michigan State University and two Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas within Michigan to support the project. These staff began work on the project in good faith, but all work had to be stopped due to the funding delay, and staff will be laid off if the delay continues.

The final project the GLRI funding supports is the Great Lakes Watercraft Coordinated Data Sharing Pilot project. This would allow Great Lakes jurisdictions to share watercraft data with others in the region through a cohesive data collection program. The program would inform regional and national boater movement models, improve understanding of risk, and drive management and prevention actions for invasives. Without data sharing many of these jurisdictions are left on their own and in the dark about the level of risk the bodies of water they are responsible for face from invasive species.

The Great Lakes are a vital asset for the United States. They hold 90 percent of the United States' supply of fresh surface water and provide drinking water for well over 40 million people. More than 1.5 million jobs are tied to the Great Lakes, which are a key economic engine for the region that generates billions of dollars. Invasive species put all of this at risk, and these decisions will impact the lakes. It is far less expensive to invest in preventative actions and innovative management, like the projects led by MDNR and GLC, than to manage the fall out of unchecked invasive species spread.

Given the significant threats the Great Lakes face from invasive species, I ask the Department of the Interior to immediately release GLRI's obligated funds for Fiscal Year 2025 to MDNR and GLC so they can resume their vital work to protect the lakes and the communities that depend on them for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Debbie Dingell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D".

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress