

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 24, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

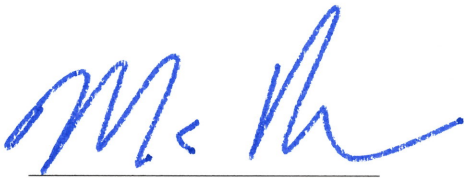
Dear Secretary Ross:

We write in full support of the State of Florida's request for a federal fishery resource disaster declaration due to Hurricane Michael's impacts on the Florida Panhandle and its fishing communities. This region of the state has long-relied upon both commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as shellfish aquaculture, to support economic growth and development. The economic effects extend far beyond the dock and provide employment opportunities and a sense of purpose and community.

Hurricane Michael has wreaked unparalleled devastation on the fishing industry in the Panhandle. Fishermen, aqua culturists, and harvesters have suffered extensive damage or outright destruction of vessels, facilities, equipment, traps, and other gear. These losses have been compounded by a decline in tourism both in the immediate aftermath of the storm and likely for the foreseeable future. Beyond mitigating the devastating impacts to residents' livelihoods, we must not allow this storm to rob future generations of a vital base of future economic activity.

As you consider the state's request for a federal fishery resource disaster declaration and additional Economic Development Agency assistance, we also remind you that the significant shellfish industry in Apalachicola Bay and neighboring areas of the Gulf Coast had already been dealt a tremendous blow in 2012, for which a federal fishery resource disaster was declared in 2013. As a result, this assistance is all the more necessary now, and we respectfully request that your decision accurately reflects the grave situation along the shores of Florida's Panhandle. We stand ready to work with you to secure the federal resources needed to fulfill this request.

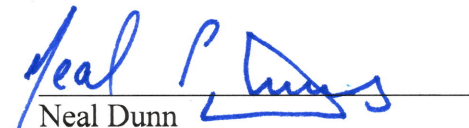
Sincerely,



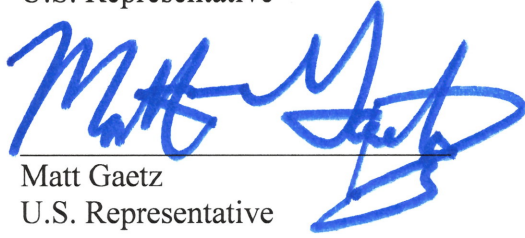
Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator


Neal Dunn
U.S. Representative


Al Lawson
U.S. Representative


Matt Gaetz
U.S. Representative