JACK BERGMAN
1ST DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–2201

November 23, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2267 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As the U.S. Representative for Michigan's First Congressional District, I write to urge you to include in any year-end continuing resolution or spending package emergency supplemental funding to replenish the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP). Private forest landowners in my district are still recovering from a historic ice storm in March 2025 and a second severe blizzard in March 2026, and many have spent more than a year preparing applications for assistance that USDA now says it cannot fund. Congress created EFRP to respond to emergencies, and its funding should reflect that purpose.

In late March 2025, a historic ice storm damaged roughly 3 million acres of forest across Northern Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula. The President approved a Major Disaster Declaration for 13 impacted counties and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, and USDA opened EFRP sign-up for ice storm damage in May 2025. Just under a year later, another severe winter storm struck the region, hitting many of the same woods before cleanup from the first storm was complete.

Established in the 2008 Farm Bill (P.L. 110-246), EFRP reimburses owners of private, nonindustrial forest land for up to 75 percent of the cost of restoring forests damaged by natural disasters. Eligible work includes removing debris and hazard trees, preparing land, replanting trees, and repairing forest roads. For many landowners, EFRP is the only federal assistance available after a disaster damages their woods. The program's benefits, however, also reach well beyond individual landowners. Healthy, restored forests sustain the timber, recreation, and tourism industries that rural economies across the country depend on. Restoration also reduces wildfire and pest risk, limits erosion that degrades water quality, and rebuilds wildlife habitat.

Despite its importance, EFRP does not receive a regular annual appropriation, with funding varying widely from year to year and dependent on emergency supplemental appropriations. Congress last provided that funding in the American Relief Act, 2025 (P.L. 118-158), which appropriated approximately $357 million for EFRP to remain available until expended. The fact of the matter is these funds have now been almost completely expended, with USDA confirming that requests for EFRP assistance exceed the funding available.

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As a result, new applications are no longer being approved, and pending applications – some of which have been open for more than a year – have no path forward.

Without emergency supplemental funding, these applicants will continue to wait and their land will continue to languish. The consequences of delay go beyond inconvenience. Downed and damaged timber left in place increases the risk of wildfire, disease, and insect infestation. Salvageable timber loses value as it rots. Landowners who cannot wait for EFRP to be replenished face a difficult choice: begin restoration at their own expense with no promise of reimbursement, or leave the damage untreated until the next disaster compounds it.

As such, I respectfully request that you:

1. Work with USDA to determine the level of funding needed to clear the existing backlog of eligible EFRP applications and to sustain the program through the next two years at minimum; and

2. Include that amount as emergency-designated supplemental appropriations in the next funding measure following the current continuing resolution.

Landowners in Northern Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula did what was asked of them. They documented their damage, hosted site visits, and waited. They should not have to fight Washington to get help recovering. If Congress calls this emergency relief, it needs to act like it's an emergency.

I appreciate your attention to this request and stand ready to work with you to ensure these landowners can recover.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress