

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

July 25, 2023

Randy Moore
Chief

U.S. Forest Service
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Washington, DC 20250

Gina Owens
Eastern Regional Forester

U.S. Forest Service
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Shannon Rische
Forest Supervisor
Hiawatha National Forest
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Gladstone, MI 49837

Chief Moore, Forester Owens, and Supervisor Rische:

I write to express my concerns regarding the sudden closure of campgrounds in the east zone of Hiawatha National Forest. I also request the Forest Service provide further information as to what led to the closures, how the Forest Service is addressing it, and how it will avoid any similar problems in the future.

First, I wish to impress how harmful these sudden closures have been for those looking to visit the Upper Peninsula, and especially for the dozens of small communities who rely on these visitors during the camping season to make ends meet. While the temporary closure of six campsites may seem insignificant in the grand scheme, it has very real consequences on those who call the U.P. home. I appreciate the Forest Service's efforts to ensure at least some of these campgrounds will be opened in mid-August. However, it's important to note that this is near the end of the camping season and will offer little tangible relief for businesses that have already lost several months' worth of customers.

I therefore request the Forest Service do everything in its power to open as many of these sites as possible, as quickly as possible. I also request the openings be announced well in advance so that campers can plan their trips ahead of time, and at least a portion of the 2023 season can be salvaged.

Additionally, since there has been significant finger pointing between Forest Service and the concessionaire of the campgrounds as to the cause and blame for the closures, I request answers to the following questions:

- **What are the current requirements and rules for the Forest Service and concessionaires in identifying and removing dangerous trees on campgrounds?**
- **Since this concessionaire has operated under USFS permit for several years, why has this issue only arisen now?** Were there any changes made to the practices or requirements of campground operators in the past year? How were these changes communicated with concessionaires?



- **Why did it take until May for the problem to be identified?** No matter who is to blame for the current state of the campsites, the issue of dangerous trees should have been known and addressed well before the start of the 2023 camping season.
- Since the Forest Service is currently soliciting applications to operate the concession sites starting in the 2024 recreation season, **what measures are being taken to ensure this problem will not arise again with the new operator?**

I would welcome the chance to review any and all relevant communication between the Forest Service and the concessionaire to aid in the answering of these questions.

I appreciate your attention to these requests. My staff and I stand ready to provide any assistance necessary to ensure these closures are resolved and campers can once again enjoy Hiawatha National Forest.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress