



STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

GARLIN GILCHRIST II
LT. GOVERNOR

April 3, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Administrator Isabel Casillas Guzman
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 3rd St., SW
Washington, DC 20416

Administrator Deanne Criswell
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St., SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader Jeffries, Minority Leader McConnell, Administrator Guzman, and Administrator Criswell,

As Michigan continues to wrestle with the lasting impact of record high winter temperatures, I write to you today seeking your cooperation and leadership on federal solutions for this unique and likely increasing problem affecting winter tourism industries across the Midwest.

There is no denying it – we are facing an unprecedented problem resulting in a devastating impact on our businesses and regional economies. In Michigan, the [UP200](#), an annual dog sled race in our state’s Upper Peninsula, was cancelled for the second year in a row because of warm weather, while this year, the [CopperDog 150](#) in the Keweenaw Peninsula and the [Tahquamenon Country Sled Dog Race](#) in Newberry were both also cancelled due to weather. Just [16% of the Great Lakes](#) froze over this winter, compared to 53% normally. Marquette has seen [72.6 inches of snow](#) this season, compared to 127 inches on average. The warm winter impact has also hit statewide, with Detroit reaching 73 degrees on February 27, the [hottest February day in recorded history](#) since 1874, and snowfall in Grand Rapids falling [more than three feet](#)—36 inches—below the seasonal average.



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For our many businesses and regional economies, this exceptionally warm weather has dealt a devastating blow. The Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA) has shared that some ski areas were not able to make snow before Christmas at all, and those that did lost all or most of their base prior to the Christmas/New Year holiday week, when the average ski area draws in approximately 22% of their winter revenue. They also shared that normal revenue at Michigan's 30 ski areas over the Christmas/New Year holiday week totals between \$39 and \$40 million, but revenue this holiday week was only \$12 million. MSIA also estimates that the additional losses are over \$13.7 million and will increase, while in total, they estimate Michigan ski areas have lost over \$41 million.

Michigan is not alone. In [Wisconsin](#), "the National Weather Service reports that snowfall statewide has been 20 to 30 inches below normal this winter. In the Lake Superior snowbelt, generally across Ashland, Iron, and Vilas counties, snowfall was 40 to 70 inches below normal." In [Minnesota](#), from December to February, the state "experienced the [warmest meteorological winter](#) on record. Through February 29th, there has only been 14.3" of snow in the Twin Cities, the [second-lowest season total](#) on record. In Duluth, only 15.7" snow has fallen, with an average snow depth of 1.8" – both among the [five lowest measures](#) on record. This lack of precipitation has exacerbated an ongoing drought."

I appreciate the cooperation of the Small Business Administration (SBA) in identifying existing continuing SBA Drought Declarations across Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, through which small businesses affected by a "low-snow" winter can apply for relief in the form of Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs). I also appreciate SBA's approval of my request to declare a drought in Ontonagon County, which opened up a path for relief in Houghton County. In Michigan, we are working closely with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and SBA field offices to assist eligible businesses in applying for and accessing those resources, and it is clear that many will be helped through that process. I am pleased that the drought declarations are providing relief in 43 counties across Michigan, as well as scores of counties across Minnesota and Wisconsin.

However, this solution is not designed for the problem at hand, and the truth is we do not have a reliable or well-tailored tool for federal relief for businesses devastated by unseasonably warm winters. As governor, I do not have the ability to draw down any federal funds by declaring a "warm winter" or "no snow" disaster, as I do for declaring other disasters like storms or droughts. And where I do have the ability to declare for droughts, I am limited to only the severest levels of drought, which has left many counties in Michigan uncovered by any sort of federal SBA relief this winter, although they are feeling the impact just as much as their neighboring counties.

For example, in **Chippewa County**, Best Maintenance and Lawn Care employs 15-20 workers for winter maintenance jobs each year, and reports losses from this low-snow



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winter upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Further south in the county in Pickford, Dan's Resort offers ice fishing, snowmobiling, and cabin rentals, and had to cancel both the Munuscong Minute Ice Fishing Derby and the Perch Princess Ice Fishing Derby—a women-only competition in support of women in the outdoors. Meanwhile, businesses in neighboring Mackinac and Luce counties can access relief under the drought declarations there.

In **Baraga County**, Ruth Lake Resort owners David Swanson and Dax Richer explain that as new small business owners, they have suffered drastic financial impacts due to the winter drought, with their snowmobiling-reliant resort hit hard when all out-of-town snowmobilers canceled their bookings due to the winter drought. Also in Baraga, the L'Anse Motel experienced a 60% downturn in sales compared to last year and reports that revenue is not enough to cover bills, all while neighboring counties facing the same weather patterns fall under a drought designation and can access EIDLs.

In **Keweenaw County**, Visit Keweenaw reports that from December 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024 demand for overnight stays was down year over year by an estimated 17%, and lodging revenue from overnight sales is estimated to be down by 19%, representing a loss of \$1.4 million in direct visitor spending. For example, Glacia Tavern in Mohawk is a small family-owned business that suffered a loss of \$30,000 and 1,400 customers over three months. Nearby Mt. Bohemia typically welcomes 35,000 skier visits and is open approximately 100 days each winter, relying solely on natural snow. This year, they welcomed only 9,800 skiers and were only open for skiing 47 days due to a lack of snow, decreasing revenue by over 60%. Meanwhile, other Upper Peninsula counties facing the same low-snow winter fall under drought declarations and can access EIDLs.

In Michigan's lower peninsula, businesses in counties as far south as Saginaw qualify for relief under drought declarations while others do not. For example, Timber Ridge in **Van Buren County** receives around 100 inches of snow in a typical season, but this past winter the count was just 35 inches. Add the record warm temperatures and Timber Ridge was not able to open their slopes until mid-January, missing the critical peak Christmas/New Year holiday weeks, when they usually make half their gross revenue. Unfortunately, they were only open 28 days this winter, when they normally count on 90 to 100 days. Right now, they are in the process of selling off assets to make it through the summer.

Meanwhile, Swiss Valley in **Cass County** was only able to operate 49 days this winter, and therefore counted roughly 27,000 skiers, as opposed to a typical year when they would welcome 50,000. Similarly in **Oakland County**, Mt. Holly experienced a revenue drop of 29%. They were open 79 days as opposed to the typical 100, and skier visits were down almost 30%.



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Furthermore, while some businesses—like ski resorts and nearby restaurants and shops—may be able to point to a lack of snow as the reason their business is suffering, others affected by an unseasonably warm winter—like ice fishing guides, businesses tied to ice fishing festivals, and shops who sell cold weather gear—may struggle to tie their warm weather impacts to the lack of precipitation, even in counties that are covered by drought declarations.

While helpful, the drought declaration path is not a reliable or accurate measure for the problems these communities are facing. And with the [impacts of climate change](#) only suggesting that this problem could worsen, I am seeking your help now in creating lasting solutions for the decades ahead.

Therefore, I write to you—our nation’s federal legislators and administrators—and request that you develop regulatory or legislative solutions that can ensure businesses impacted by an exceptionally “warm winter” can seek appropriate federal relief. We would be happy to connect you with those businesses and local governments who have been unable to access relief this year, and we stand by ready to support a path forward that could help us all unlock reliable, lasting solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gretchen Whitmer".

Gretchen Whitmer

Governor