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

November 16, 2026

Dr. Neil Jacobs
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Jacobs,

We write in support of the State of Indiana's request to establish a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) in Northwest Indiana, along the coastal region bordering Lake Michigan. In November 2024, then-Governor Eric Holcomb submitted a formal request for a designation, and, in July 2026, Governor Mike Braun sent a letter reaffirming interest in this initiative. As members of the Indiana Congressional delegation, we urge NOAA to advance the State's request through the appropriate designation process and provide an update on its status.

Northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan coastal region is a key environmental resource that provides unique economic, recreational, and educational opportunities in our state. We are committed to preserving and strengthening this region and believe that a NERR designation would support its long-term vitality, restoration, and resilience.

Since 2001, Indiana has partnered with NOAA in coastal management through the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program, which has supported public access improvements, educational opportunities, habitat preservation and restoration, and technical assistance for local coastal communities. Establishing a NERR in Northwest Indiana would build upon these efforts and provide meaningful benefits to the state and the broader Great Lakes bioregion.

Currently, Indiana does not have a NERR, and only two reserves are designated in the Great Lakes region, neither of which is located along the southern shore of Lake Michigan. This region includes unique freshwater estuarine habitats that warrant sustained research, monitoring, and

education. Establishing a NERR in Northwest Indiana would provide distinct value to the overall Reserve system by addressing research gaps, advancing scientific understanding of the region's unique ecological processes, and enhancing management and restoration efforts for similar systems across the Great Lakes.

Additionally, Purdue University's College of Agriculture is strongly positioned to serve as the lead organization for this initiative. As a nationally recognized land grant institution, Purdue has a proven record of partnering with state and federal agencies, including the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, to advance research, education, and outreach efforts. Purdue is also home to several NOAA-funded programs, such as the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program and the Midwestern Regional Climate Center. This demonstrated expertise in coastal management prepares the university to support the long-term success of a NERR in Indiana.

The Lake Michigan coastal region is essential to Indiana's identity, economy, and environment. By expanding opportunities for research, education, and community engagement, establishing a NERR in Northwest Indiana would safeguard this vital environmental resource for generations to come. We appreciate NOAA's consideration of this request and look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen the Great Lakes region.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Mrvan
Member of Congress

James R. Baird, PhD
Member of Congress

Jim Banks
U.S. Senator for Indiana

Todd Young
United States Senator