

BILL HUIZENGA  
2ND DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2202**

September 21, 2020

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\*BY APPOINTMENT

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The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

I write in support of completion of the review and reaffirmation of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians (Petitioner #146) who have been on the “active consideration” list since December 1, 2013. At the time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs stated it would take approximately 18 months to review and present its “proposed findings.” To date, it’s been nearly seven years and each deadline is met with an additional 90-day extension, the latest of which expires October 2020. It is important to note that the tribe sent a letter of intent for federal recognition to the BIA in 1994, 26 years ago.

In 1994, then-Congressman Dale Kildee introduced legislation, H.R. 2376, which was passed by Congress and signed into law (P.L. 103-324), that recognized two other Michigan Ottawa tribes whose histories are similar to that of the Grand River: the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. Grand River wasn’t included in this legislation because tribal elders at the time feared federal government intrusion into their lives if they were recognized. The tribe has now been waiting for nearly a quarter of a century to be recognized due to further bureaucratic delays.

The tribe’s rights are slowly being eviscerated by this delay. In 1997, Congress enacted P.L. 105-143, the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act (H.R. 1604), which reserved a percentage of the funds appropriated for payment of land claims to “newly recognized or reaffirmed tribes described in section 110” and included a provision that allowed an additional 11 years for certain Michigan tribes, such as the Grand River tribe, to be recognized and qualify for the funds. Because the tribe was not federally recognized after this 11-year period, it lost millions of dollars at the time and continues to suffer the consequences today.

Now, other tribal rights are being slowly eroded or eviscerated. For instance, Michigan tribes sued the State of Michigan and the Department of Interior over fishing and hunting rights. Grand River couldn’t be a party to that lawsuit because it is not a federally recognized tribe. Likewise, Grand River has become ineligible for tuition assistance because it isn’t a recognized

tribe. There are countless other very concerning examples of this tribe's rights being slowly taken away.

If the tribe is not recognized soon, it will potentially lose even more rights and will be an injustice to many. Therefore, I respectfully request that that the BIA, through the Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA), issue its proposed findings for the Grand River Bands by the latest extension date of October 13, 2020.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my office. Thank you in advance for consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized monogram 'BH' followed by the name 'Huizenga' in a cursive script.

Bill Huizenga  
Member of Congress