

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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GOVERNOR



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September 25, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Secretary Ross:

Due to the profound and continued impacts of Hurricane Laura on our fishery resources and fishing industry, I am writing to respectfully request that your agency declare a fishery disaster as allowed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (IJFA). In the coming months, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will vigorously work to evaluate the biological and economic impact that this historic storm has had on Louisiana. Laura was one of the strongest hurricanes on record to make landfall in the United States. It is expected that the storm's damage, once fully evaluated, will rival that of Hurricane Rita, which hit this area in September 2005.

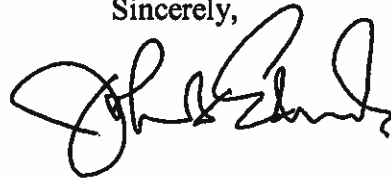
Hurricane Laura's storm track impacted some of the nation's most important fishing communities. Hurricane Laura also exacerbated the current economic and physical difficulties of selling and harvesting seafood in Louisiana related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In our coastal parishes, the commercial and recreational fishing industry is a vital employer and important component of these parishes' and ultimately this state's economy. The impacted parishes were home to nearly 2,500 commercial fishermen and vessels combined and over 100 wholesale dealers participating in the oyster, shrimp, crab, and saltwater finfish fisheries. Additionally, approximately 100 licensed charter captains call the impacted parishes home.

Louisiana fisheries are vital not only to the state's economy but also to the nation. Louisiana was first in volume in 2018 with 1.0 billion pounds landed and 4th in value at \$377 million in that same year. As the largest producer of domestic seafood for our nation, restoration of Louisiana's fisheries, fisheries infrastructure, and habitat is critical to our nation's economy and to the families in our state who make a living in the fishing industry. We must not overlook the devastating effects that this natural disaster will have on commercial fishermen and fisheries infrastructure in the Gulf of Mexico. Fishing communities suffered devastating infrastructure damage to docks and boating facilities; lost gear and vessels; lost housing; loss of stored product. In addition to these immediate impacts, these communities face uncertain futures as they try to get back to work and recover. Lack of usable infrastructure and supplies like ice and bait only exacerbate their plight.

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By immediately making funds available, our fishermen can return to commerce and supply our nation with U.S. caught shrimp, crabs, oysters, and finfish. We are extremely grateful for any assistance you and your department can provide as our state and our residents continue to suffer from storm-related impacts. Such a declaration of a federal fisheries disaster for Louisiana may help in obtaining federal financial assistance for our fishers, processors, docks, and for the state to help rehabilitate the important fishery species upon which our seafood industry relies. Thank you for considering this urgent request. We look forward to working with you as Louisiana recovers from Hurricane Laura.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

John Bel Edwards
Governor