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August 28, 2026

Secretary Doug Burgum
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Re: *The Wyandotte Nation's Ancestors Named Lake Ontario*

Dear Secretary Burgum:

I write to you on behalf of the Wyandotte Nation about the President's claim that he has renamed Lake Ontario, a place my people hold dear, and a place that bears our name. As Chief of the Wyandotte Nation, I take offense at any effort to change the name of Lake Ontario.

The Wyandotte Nation has a long history of migration, removal, and survival. Our homelands were located near the Georgian Bay in what is now Ontario, and Lake Ontario was an integral part of our traditional lands. In the early 1700s, the Wendat Confederacy—sometimes called the Huron Confederacy—migrated, with some of our Ancestors remaining in Canada and some moving into what is now Michigan and Ohio. Thereafter, the United States removed our people twice, once to Kansas and then again to Oklahoma. The Wyandotte Nation now holds its seat of government in Oklahoma, but our connections to our homelands and relatives have never faded, and we carry them with us today.

On August 27, 2026, the President signed an [Executive Order](#) titled "Honoring the American History of the Great Lakes and Renaming Lake Ontario as Lake America," in which he directed that Lake Ontario "officially be renamed as Lake America." He said it was the policy of his Administration to "recognize the extraordinary contributions of the American people and the rich heritage of our history by naming great natural landmarks for our shared achievements," recounting America's connections to Lake Ontario dating back to the colonial period. He claimed to be using the authorities vested in him by the Constitution to accomplish the renaming.

Nowhere does the President's Executive Order recognize that Tribal Nations' connections to Lake Ontario extend back before the colonial period. The name Ontario is more than 400 years old, predating both Canada and the United States. Our Wendat Ancestors used our language to name this body of water that was so important to them. "Ontario" comes from the Wendat word Ontari'io, meaning "the lake is beautiful" or "the lake is big." Lake Ontario is already named to recognize the extraordinary contributions of the American people and our rich heritage—in this

case, the name recognizes the role of the Wyandotte Nation and our Ancestors in the American story.

The Executive Order also fails to acknowledge that, rather than vest the President with unilateral power to rewrite American history by renaming significant places, the Constitution instead recognizes Tribal Nations as inherently sovereign governments predating the United States. Lake Ontario was named by one such sovereign Tribal Nation, and its name should thus remain.

The Executive Order directs you, as the Secretary of the Interior, to “take all appropriate actions to rename” Lake Ontario and to update the Geographic Names Information System. We urge you to help the President understand that Lake Ontario’s current name honors the ongoing sovereignty of the Wyandotte Nation, a Tribal Nation woven into the fabric of America’s history and identity. In honoring the Wyandotte Nation’s name for Lake Ontario, America celebrates its own rich heritage.

Place names preserve history, language, and heritage. Changing Lake Ontario’s name is an erasure of our history from the collective American narrative. It is also disrespectful to our present-day Canadian Wendat family, whose Ancestors have called this region home for generations. Lake Ontario is part of our Indigenous and American history and should be respected. Then, now, and always, it is Lake Ontario.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Billy Friend". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "B" and "F".

Chief Billy Friend
Wyandotte Nation

CC:

Billy Kirkland, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior

Phil Tirino, Deputy Associate Director, Office of the Chief of Staff, Executive Office of the President