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July 18, 2023

To: U.S. Economic Development Administration

Re: Letter of support for Northern Michigan's Tech Hubs application

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners, I am pleased to provide this letter of support on behalf of the County for the Discover Blue Consortium's application for a Strategy Development Grant via the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Tech Hubs funding opportunity for the "Advancing Northern Michigan's Blue Economy" project.

Leelanau County government serves Leelanau Peninsula residents within Northwest Lower Michigan. With Traverse Connect as the lead applicant, Leelanau County is a fellow primary coalition member of the Discover Blue Consortium. We are committed to executing our roles, responsibilities, or commitments related to the project.

We believe the economic growth stemming from this project will prove directly beneficial to our community in Leelanau County, as well as to the wider northern Michigan region, especially within historically underserved communities. We, as an organization, are supportive of the consortium's commitment to creating significant and equitable economic impact for all of northern Michigan. We are in support of this project and consider ourselves a strategic partner.

Leelanau County government has advocated for and been supportive of the initiative by several members of the Discover Blue Consortium, who have already proven their commitment to collaboration to build the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center, located on West Grand Traverse Bay within Leelanau County. This research center will become the hub for the research, development, and commercialization of freshwater and marine technologies and their applications affecting the Great Lakes and similar freshwater systems throughout the world. Significant economic development is expected to result from the creation of the Center, driving job growth and local employment, as well as attracting new talent and international recognition to the region. The effort to build the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center has already proven to be a success, with the State of Michigan recently having allocated \$15M within its annual budget dedicated to building out Phase 1 of the project.

It is also our belief that this project will position northern Michigan as a global leader in freshwater innovation and the blue economy and represents an important step towards ensuring the United States protects vital economic and natural resource protection interests for the Great Lakes in years to come. We see the investments being made in support of this project as a path toward building a foundation for a vibrant and sustainable future for northern Michigan, the Great Lakes region, and the United States more broadly.

- The proposed Freshwater Research & Innovation Center will establish the Grand Traverse Region as a global hub for Great Lakes freshwater research and innovation. Leelanau County is committed to continuing to promote the message that our unique geographical position drives northern Michigan’s role as a leader in this space, and its commitment to protecting the environment, Great Lakes natural resources, and national security.
- Leelanau County, a peninsula on a peninsula with five associated islands, is located in Northwest Lower Michigan on Lake Michigan, and is surrounded by 100 miles of fresh water, which also includes 33 inland lakes including the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Park. Michigan has the largest freshwater coastline in the nation, with expansive sand dune systems and wetlands complexes.¹ The County’s economy relies on the protection and responsible utilization of our most abundant natural resources. It is within our greatest interest to protect our coastline and the Great Lakes, while at the same time harnessing our greatest natural asset to drive equitable and sustainable economic growth.

We strongly encourage and recommend that the U.S. EDA support northern Michigan’s Tech Hubs application from the Discover Blue Consortium to advance the blue economy in the Great Lakes region. We are committed to and excited about this important project that will help drive a substantial, equitable economic impact for the entire region.

Sincerely,

Ty Wessell, Chairperson
Leelanau County Board of Commissioners

¹ <https://www.michigan.gov/egle/about/organization/water-resources/coastal-management/michigans-resilient-coast#:~:text=Michigan%20has%20the%20longest%20freshwater,accretion%2C%20erosion%2C%20and%20transport.>