STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

M. SCOTT BOWEN
DIRECTOR

November 5, 2026

Andrew Haystead, Supervisor
Norvell Township Board of Trustees
300 Mill Rd., Brooklyn, MI 49230

Dear Norvell Township Board of Trustees:

You have pending before you a permit application from American Aggregates of Michigan (AAOM) to build and operate a gravel mine in Norvell Township abutting Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve. As the steward of the State Park and a significant adjacent property owner, the Michigan DNR is writing to you to express our concerns with the impacts such a mining operation would have on the park: its waters, wetlands, birds and other wildlife, and park users.

As described in the Watkins Lake State Park General Management Plan, “The rolling topography and expansive undeveloped areas within this park create beautiful vistas that are easily accessible from the former rail corridor running through the property. Such vantage points are rarely found on public land in the region. The scenic Watkins Lake provides a calm-water paddling and fishing experience with the absence of shore development.”

The Plan also provides, “The variety of habitats within WLP, including wetlands and a large Prairie Fen complex of exceptional quality, create a heightened potential for the presence and observation of rare or threatened and endangered species. The eastern massasauga rattlesnake, bald eagle, Mitchell’s satyr butterfly, and rare grassland birds make their homes here. The park is another link in a chain of protected lands in the region.”

Also, according to the Park Plan, “WLP’s waterfowl refuge provides an excellent opportunity to see a wide variety of Michigan’s waterfowl, including diving ducks, such as scaup, canvasbacks, and wading birds. The refuge draws birders from the surrounding area and beyond, boosting the park’s attendance, particularly during the spring and fall migration. The road bisecting Watkins Lake provides easy access to exceptional waterfowl viewing opportunities.”

Altogether, 57% of the 1,122 acre-Park is classified as Ecologically Sensitive, Primitive or Back Country.

All this would be compromised by the gravel mine proposed by AAOM. The mining application seeks to build and operate a 625-acre gravel mine directly abutting the park and Watkins Lake, within 300 feet of the Park’s borders. According to the application, the proposed mine would excavate gravel by levelling hills next to the park and would

operate an aggregate processor on the site. According to the application, the proposed mine would haul gravel from the mine in gravel trucks at an average rate of 9 trucks an hour, 10-12 hours a day, Monday-Friday and Saturday mornings, for 20 years. The same number of trucks per hour would return empty to the site.

We are deeply concerned that the proposed mine would impair the natural resources of the park through changing and diminishing the pattern of ground and surface water flow and the water quality of that flow, all of which is vital to sustain the park's natural resources. We are also highly concerned that the mine would harm birds and wildlife and diminish park use and visitation with trucking, dust, noise, visual impairments and other impacts.

We ask Norvell Township to consider these expected negative impacts to Watkins Lake State Park and County Preserve as you determine whether to grant or deny the aggregate mining permit.

If you need assistance or have any further questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact Mr. Chris Semrinec, DNR Legislative Liaison at 517-643-2033; semrinecc@michigan.gov; or you may contact me.

Sincerely,

M. Scott Bowen
Director

cc: Ms. Terri Curtis, Township Trustee
Mr. Zachary Panak, Township Trustee
Ms. Sharon Pero, Township Clerk
Ms. Shannon Lott, Natural Resource Deputy, DNR
Ms. Kristin Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer, DNR
Mr. Tom Bissett, Chief, Parks & Recreation Division, DNR
Mr. Craig Brunet, Legislative and Legal Affairs & Tribal Liaison, DNR
Mr. Chris Semrinec, Legislative Liaison, DNR