



Audubon | CONNECTICUT

Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing of February 11, 2020

House Bill No. 5005 (Governor’s Bill) – AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the National Audubon Society through its affiliate state office, Audubon Connecticut. The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, bipartisan advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation.

Our conservation network extends statewide and includes nearly 30,000 members, five Connecticut chapters, and many partners along the [Atlantic Flyway](#).

Through our conservation programs focused on Coasts, Community Conservation, Healthy Forests, and Climate, we are working to preserve habitat and protect bird species that are of state, national, and global concern—like the Piping Plover, Wood Thrush, and Marsh Sparrow. It begins with birds, but our mission connects people to a much wider range of issues such as building a more resilient Long Island Sound, restoring a healthier, natural balance to urban places by bringing back green habitats, managing our forests and wetlands to sequester carbon, reducing pesticide use, and promoting land conservation. Our goal is to reduce the impact of global climate change on birds, wildlife, and people.

House Bill No. 5005:

Today we are asking that the Appropriations Committee reverse some adjustments that the Governor recommends regarding the budget of Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). DEEP’s Budget relies on a complicated set of agency funding mechanisms and sources of funds (e.g., the General Fund, non-lapsing funds, federal funds, etc.). Through this written testimony we are articulating areas where we believe General Fund resources are NOT being sufficiently allocated in the second year of the Biennium Budget.

For many years DEEP has been asked to do more with less. This is especially true now as DEEP works to advance our understating of Connecticut’s ecology as the effects of climate change continue to advance. Yet, rather than increasing appropriations for an agency whose name includes Environmental Protection as part of its mission, we see DEEP’s appropriations continue to decrease. This means Connecticut is getting fewer and fewer environmental conservation

professionals—like environmental scientists and Environmental Conservation (EnCon) Police Officers—at a time we need them the most.

Funding for DEEP's Branch of Environmental Conservation (EC) is just not keeping pace with the ever expanding responsibilities that the EC Branch is being asked to perform. (For example, consider the recent work of the Commission on Environmental Standardsⁱ that resulted from the passage of Public Act 19-71ⁱⁱ - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROCUREMENT OF ENERGY DERIVED FROM OFFSHORE WIND.) Scientists in the EC Branch are responsible for performing natural resource and endangered species reviews and interpreting new scientific reports about how climate change is impacting Connecticut's coastal and inland natural resources. (See the Governor's Executive Order #3ⁱⁱⁱ.)

In addition, EnCon police officers need additional resources to properly enforce the natural resource protection laws currently on the books including protecting piping plover nesting areas.

At the same time we are reducing DEEP's General Fund Budget, many students in Connecticut's colleges and universities are focusing their study on science and research to better understand how climate change will impact our State. As they graduate, these students are looking to pursue careers here in Connecticut in science and environmental conservation. Historically, DEEP would hire many of these students to create a team of EC professionals in state government. Unfortunately, DEEP's EC's team is eroding away because we are not recruiting enough new talent to be trained by the existing team of EC professionals at DEEP. In addition, many of the existing EC professionals at DEEP are likely to retire in the next few years.

Let's reverse this trend and invest in Human Resources for DEEP's Branch of Environmental Conservation. We are asking that you provide DEEP with the General Fund financial resources needed to hire a train new EC professionals.

According to the Budget Summary for DEEP, the Governor's Adjustment proposes a reduction of 17 positions from the General Fund. Seven of these General Fund positions are being transferred to the Passport to Parks Account. At a minimum, we ask that these 7 positions be retained on the General Fund and be used to support an expansion of EC professionals in the EC Branch. We realize you have difficult choices to make, but we believe that more EC professional staff are needed, and there are many recent graduates from colleges and universities in Connecticut who are available to make environmental conservation their career.

In closing, the National Audubon Society relies upon the enormous generosity of our members and donors to keep our mission going. As a 501(c) not for profit entity the National Audubon Society manages many properties in Connecticut. We make these properties available to the public so that both residents and visitors alike can enjoy birds and an open space experience. These are Connecticut eco-tourism experiences where we provide natural resource and conservation education. The link below provides additional information about our centers,

sanctuaries, properties and programs. <http://ct.audubon.org/about-us/centers-sanctuaries-and-chapters>

In addition we would like to share with you our latest report, [*Survival by Degrees*](#). We invite you to take a look at our '[Birds & Climate Visualizer](#)' (this is the main landing page - scroll down to find the visualizer) - which allows the user to query by zip code to see which impacts from climate change are predicted for your area, and how birds near you will be affected.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please contact Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Connecticut, National Audubon Society, at Robert.LaFrance@Audubon.org (Phone 203.405.0655)

ⁱ The CES report can be viewed here:

<http://www.dpuc.state.ct.us/DEEPEnergy.nsf/c6c6d525f7cdd1168525797d0047c5bf/d3d132f10da308ea8525844f00683853?OpenDocument>

ⁱⁱ https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2019&bill_num=7156)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-3.pdf>