



Testimony of The Connecticut Audubon Society Regarding H.B. No. 5005. February 12, 2020.

The Connecticut Audubon Society has serious concerns about a proposed reduction in the budget for the Environmental Conservation branch of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, which includes the Wildlife and Forestry Divisions of the agency. Connecticut has historically languished near the bottom tier of states in regard to state funding for non-game wildlife. Any further cuts on the Environmental Conservation side of the agency will exacerbate this unfortunate situation. This comes at a time when our native biological diversity and natural resources are facing unprecedented challenges from increasingly dire threats including climate change, rising sea levels, and invasive species.

Wildlife-associated recreation is a swiftly growing activity that generates millions of dollars of economic activity in Connecticut. According to the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, more than 1 million Connecticut residents took part in wildlife observation activities annually with an annual expenditure of more than \$500 million dollars. Expenditures for hunting and fishing adds more than \$300 million per year. According to the 2011 report these expenditures grew substantially to more than \$900 million annually for wildlife observation activities alone. Wildlife is far too important to the state's economy to cut funding for wildlife programs, which would be the end result of cuts to the Environmental Conservation branch.

We ask the appropriations committee that instead of cuts to the Environmental Conservation branch of the agency, additional investments need to be made, particularly in the areas of agency wildlife biologists, foresters and environmental conservation police.

Founded in 1898, the Connecticut Audubon Society protects Connecticut's environment by inspiring conservation action. We connect people to birds, other wildlife and their habitats through education, habitat improvement, environmental advocacy and facilitating research. With more than 5,500 household members we operate nature facilities in Fairfield, Milford, Glastonbury, Pomfret, Hampton, and Sherman, a center in Old Lyme, and an EcoTravel office in Essex. We manage 20 wildlife sanctuaries encompassing almost 3,300 acres of open space in Connecticut, and educate more than 50,000 children and adults annually.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick M. Comins". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director