



Audubon | CONNECTICUT

Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing of February 19, 2021

House Bill No. 6439 (Governor's Bill) – AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

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 31,500 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. 6439:

For many years the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has been asked to do more with less funding. 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.)

Funding for DEEP's Branch of Environmental Conservation (EC) is simply not keeping pace with the ever expanding responsibilities that the EC Branch is being asked to perform. This means Connecticut is getting fewer and fewer environmental conservation professionals—like environmental scientists, biologists, foresters, and Environmental Conservation (EnCon) police officers—at a time when we need them the most.

The need for adequate staffing for the EC branch becomes even more critical as DEEP works to advance our understating of Connecticut's natural resources--and the ecosystems services that those natural resources provide—as our climate continues to change. Please remember that we ask EC Branch scientists to perform natural resource and endangered species reviews in response to an ever increasing number of renewable energy siting requests (See CT Siting Council applicationsⁱ). And these same scientists are the ones who examine new scientific reports about how climate change is impacting Connecticut's coastal and inland natural resources. (See the Governor's Executive Order #3ⁱⁱ.)

DEEP is not alone in working to better understand climate change and Audubon has also been studying the potential impact of climate change on birds. Please take a moment to review our latest report, [*Survival by Degrees*](#). We need our natural resource agencies to be adequately funded so that we can solve the climate crisis together. At the federal level, Audubon has been advocating for passage of the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA)*. Audubon and our members have supported RAWA for many years as a way to obtain federal funding for our State's Wildlife Action Plan.

The most recent RAWA proposal (Last Congress – HR2) provided a 5-year authorization of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, and removed all match requirements through FY25. It also included a small, voluntary incentive for states to incorporate plant conservation in their State Wildlife Action Plans as well as a specific reference to spending education and recreation funds in historically underserved communities. We hope and expect RAWA will be reintroduced in Congress in the next few months.

In Connecticut, DEEP's EC staff and EnCon police officers have been instrumental in allowing our residents and guests to access our state parks, forests and wildlife management during the COVID 19 pandemic. Many people have sought refuge to these natural areas as a way to cope with the difficulties and anxieties created by the COVID 19 virus. DEEP's EnCon police officers also enforce Connecticut's natural resource protection laws (including protecting piping plover nesting areas). We simply need more EnCon officers so that the EnCon police force can do their work properly and safely.

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.

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>

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 (Cell 203.668.6685)

ⁱ https://portal.ct.gov/CSC/1_Applications-and-Other-Pending-Matters/Pending-Matters

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