

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries**

**Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 5441, Long Island Sound Restoration and
Stewardship Reauthorization Act of 2023**

January 18, 2024

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record on H.R. 5441, the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Reauthorization Act of 2023. H.R. 5441 would reauthorize certain conservation and stewardship programs in the Long Island Sound (Sound). These programs are led by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Service's statement focuses on our work in collaboration with the EPA and other partners in the Long Island Sound. We defer to the EPA to provide a position on this legislation but note that EPA's collaborative work through the programs that would be reauthorized by H.R. 5441 is an important component in efforts to conserve the natural resources of the Long Island Sound.

The Long Island Sound includes twelve priority habitats that are home to a variety of species considered of greatest conservation need in both New York and Connecticut and protected under the Endangered Species Act. Thriving coastal habitats also provide important ecosystem services and serve as buffers to elevated tides and wave action during storm events, making coastal communities more resilient to climate change.

The Service has a long history of coordinating with partners to conserve and restore the health of the Sound through the Long Island Sound Study (LISS), a cooperative effort involving the EPA, other federal and state agencies, researchers, user groups, and local partners. Together we are working to improve the conservation of wildlife and the habitats and waters they depend on within the Sound. Service biologists serve on several LISS committees, including the Federal Partners Coordination Team, a newly formed collaboration that focuses on building efficiencies across agencies to accomplish shared goals. In this role, the Service brings expertise on federal trust species and coastal habitats that informs the prioritization of research and restoration needs within the Sound.

In 2005, the LISS initiated the Long Island Sound Futures Fund (Fund) grant program, which last year awarded more than \$12 million to support 39 projects working to improve the health of Long Island Sound. This effort was led by the Service, the EPA, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Restoration of priority habitats has been a focus of partnership efforts within the Sound. The LISS has worked with the Service on several priorities within the Sound, including restoring

vital habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife like piping plovers and roseate terns. One focus area for these species has been New York's Great Gull Island, which has the largest breeding colony of endangered roseate terns in the Northeast. The LISS has provided grants through the Fund for important management efforts to improve nesting habitat on the island. The Service supports these grants by providing technical expertise to identify and prioritize vegetation management strategies to improve nesting habitat on the island. Every fall and spring since 2012, the Service has coordinated the treatment of invasive plants on the island, which is key to the recovery and success of the breeding population of the roseate tern at this sentinel site.

Improved water quality and riverine restoration following the investment of LISS, EPA, and Service funds has also led to the recovery of migratory and forage fish that support terns and other marine wildlife throughout the Sound and beyond. These water quality improvements support thriving habitats, the species that depend on them, and benefit local communities. The Service is proud to work closely with the EPA and LISS partners to improve wildlife habitat and water quality, increase resilience and sustainability, and secure a healthy future for Long Island Sound.