



Statement of David O'Neill
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to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Non-Tribal Public Witness Days on Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations

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Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today representing the National Audubon Society. My name is David O'Neill and I am Audubon's Chief Conservation Officer, here today to discuss federal appropriations related to birds, conservation, and habitat protection. I am responsible for creating and advancing our conservation vision, developing strategies and using science-based accountability tools to achieve our vision of a world in which people and wildlife thrive. On behalf of the entire Audubon organization, thank you for taking this time for public stakeholder input before making critical appropriations decisions.

Audubon's mission is to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Audubon represents more than 1.7 million members and has 462 affiliated chapters, 22 state offices, and 41 nature centers across the country. Audubon is our country's oldest bird advocacy organization and one of the oldest conservation groups in the US.

For 115 years, Audubon has been fighting to protect birds and the ecosystems they need to survive. Today, those habitats are increasingly vulnerable. In the past 50 years, we've lost 3 billion birds and, just last year, we identified 389 bird species that are on the brink of extinction due to climate change. Without action, that number will only increase and the impacts will be exacerbated for birds and people alike.

Thankfully, over the past year, Congress has made progress on changing the narrative surrounding climate change. More than ever before, Americans across the country and Members of Congress across both aisles agree that climate change poses a serious threat to the American way of life. But recognizing the threat is not enough. Congress must take immediate and concrete steps to address the impacts of climate change, which are already being seen across the country, including flooding in the Nebraska plains, sea level rise affecting coastal communities, and extreme weather and precipitation events.

Federal investments in conservation and natural infrastructure will help birds and communities throughout the nation address these 21st century challenges. Federal funding is critical to

Audubon's conservation strategy and we thank Congress and this subcommittee for continued investment in our cherished landscapes, rejecting three years of administration budget proposals that would devastate the protections and places that both birds and people need. We look forward to strong, continued federal investment in protecting wildlife and the environment.

Audubon's conservation strategy focuses on protecting the habitats and resources birds need to survive. We focus 5 strategic conservation priorities: protecting and restoring our coasts, enhancing the habitat and productivity of our working lands, protecting freshwater resources, creating bird-friendly communities, and promoting proactive solutions to the climate crisis. And, we work with international partners throughout the hemisphere to conserve key bird habitats and create a full lifecycle of stewardship essential for saving migratory species.

To reach these conservation goals, Audubon encourages federal spending that supports the following components relevant to this Subcommittee:

1. Focusing on improving natural infrastructure;
2. Enhancing and protecting the places and habitats birds need now and into the future; and
3. Conserving water resources for people and birds, particularly in the arid west.

Related to these three foundational components, the National Audubon Society urges support for the following programs within the Department of Interior:

- The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, including full funding at \$6.5 million;
- State and Tribal Wildlife Grants;
- The North American Wetlands Conservation Act;
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund, including full funding at \$900 million;
- The National Wildlife Refuge System;
- The Delaware River Basin at \$12 million;
- WaterSMART Grants;
- Sage grouse conservation; and
- The Migratory Bird Program National Nongame Bird Plans at \$1.5 million.

In addition, the National Audubon Society urges full funding for the following programs within the Environmental Protection Agency:

- Geographic programs focused on restoration and conservation for the Long Island Sound, Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, San Francisco Bay, Puget Sound, South Florida, and Lake Champlain; and
- The National Estuary Program.

Prioritizing full funding for these critical programs will ensure birds have the habitat and resources they need to thrive, now and into the future. We urge Congress to reject any cuts or policy riders, past or future, that would harm birds or contribute to climate change and instead deliver a budget that protects and strengthens our environment and the ecosystems birds and humans rely on. By doing so, we will create a better future for birds and people.

Thank you, Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and the full subcommittee once again for hearing my testimony today.