



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 17, 2014
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

Raised Senate Bill No. 444 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN "IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS" PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill No. 444 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN "IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS" PROGRAM. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

Foremost amongst DEEP's existing programs is implementation of the Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan which identifies avian species of greatest conservation need and incorporates many of the elements of the proposed Important Bird Area designations. The plan has already generated remarkable conservation successes through identifying and removing threats to species of greatest conservation need, guiding landscape management, and enlisting partners in implementation of conservation actions. Building upon those successes, DEEP is currently revising the Wildlife Action Plan, providing an immediate opportunity to refine conservation areas for bird species through engagement of conservation partners.

The state Endangered Species Act and the Natural Areas Preserve Program also focus on protection and conservation of important areas for birds and other imperiled species. Under the state Endangered Species Act, the DEEP is required to identify species and habitats critical to sustaining the state's biodiversity. The regulations underlying Endangered Species Act establish the procedures necessary for such determinations, including the engagement of non-governmental conservation organizations, members of academia and the public. Similarly, the designation of, and conservation actions employed on, Natural Area Preserves are provided for in the general statutes. These designations, too, involve the engagement of non-governmental organizations, academia and the public. More notable still, several of the existing areas were designated primarily for the bird conservation values they possess.

There also exists within the state a non-governmental Important Bird Area Program (Audubon Connecticut) which has been in place for many years. This program has resulted in the designation of twenty-seven Important Bird Areas including six on DEEP properties, has created and refined management plans for those areas, and has connected similar such areas through a national program.

In summary, while we strongly support the goals of bird conservation, we believe the language of Raised Bill 444 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN "IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS" PROGRAM is more aggressive than we can support at this time. We look forward to continuing the dialogue with advocates and members of the Environment Committee and the General Assembly in balancing DEEP's overall Wildlife Action Plan for Connecticut with goals of Important Bird Areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov).