



Connecticut
Audubon Society

Testimony in support of the nomination of Robert Klee as Commissioner of the
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

January 29, 2015

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Representative Janowski, Senator Duff, members of the committee ... Thank you for including us here today. I am Tom Andersen, Director of Communications for the Connecticut Audubon Society. I am here today on behalf of Connecticut Audubon to testify in support of the nomination of Robert Klee as Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The Connecticut Audubon Society was established in 1898 in Fairfield, and is the original and still independent Audubon Society within the state. Today the organization consists of 4 nature centers, 2 museums, 19 sanctuaries, and more than 10,000 members, friends, and supporters from across the state. Connecticut Audubon's goal is to use the beauty, diversity, and visibility of our state's birds to connect more people with the natural world. Our core value is to leave future generations a state that is in better shape than the one we inherited.

We support Commissioner Klee's nomination, first and foremost because of his commitment to conservation, as demonstrated during his years with the department and in the year or so since he became acting commissioner.

We believe Commissioner Klee is moving in the right direction with the department's plan to expand and improve the state's Green Plan, and Connecticut Audubon has already pledged to work with DEEP toward meeting the state goal of protecting 21 percent of Connecticut's land by 2021. After a number of years when the pace of land preservation has decreased, we are

looking forward to the Green Plan serving as a blueprint for, and a roadmap toward, that goal.

Connecticut Audubon has already met with DEEP several times regarding the draft Green Plan, and we have urged that it both incorporate the several existing landscape connectivity efforts already underway, with an equal appreciation for the value of open space in urban areas. We look to work with DEEP to ensure the emerging Green Plan is a product of input from all interested parties, is transparently assembled, and is ultimately coupled with the financial resources to bring it to fruition by 2021.

Commissioner Klee has repeatedly shown himself to be a great partner, and adept at leveraging resources wisely. He and his staff have reached out to Connecticut Audubon Society to collaborate on projects. One example, is Osprey Nation, a partnership we built last spring to recruit a network of citizen science volunteers to help track and monitor the state's population of Ospreys, the fish-eating raptors that just decades ago were on the verge of extinction. With encouragement and support from DEEP, Connecticut Audubon was able last summer to recruit almost 200 volunteer citizen scientists and locate and visibly inspect nearly 400 Osprey nests around the state. Further, the collected data is now plotted on an interactive map on our website for all to see.

Connecticut Audubon also worked with Commissioner Klee and DEEP in a three-way partnership with Sacred Heart University to bring state of the art ecological restoration efforts and federal funding to salt marsh restoration along the banks of the Housatonic in Stratford. We believe this portrays the Commissioner's penchant for research and solid science, coupled with his zeal for partnerships as a cost effective and transparent way of protecting the state's environment.

Finally, we are delighted to note that as a youngster, Robert Klee participated in outdoor programs at our Center on Burr Street in Fairfield, and we are proud to have had a role in shaping him as a conservationist and environmentalist. More importantly we support the efforts that the department has made under Commissioner Klee to get more children involved in outdoor conservation-related activities, particularly the No Child Left Inside program.

In sum, Commissioner Klee's background in science and the law provides him with the expertise needed in this highly technical era to lead and oversee a multi-faceted staff. And he has demonstrated a collaborative and respectful relationship with key players and organizations in the state's conservation and environmental community.