
The Connecticut Audubon Society thanks the Committee and the sponsors of S.B. 1061, S.B. 1062, S.B. 76 H.B. 5312, H.B. 5999 and H.B. 7346 for proposing these legislative initiatives and for the opportunity to support these bills.

The Connecticut Audubon Society strongly supports Senate Bill 1061, “An Act Concerning the Restoration of Funds to the Community Investment Account.” We have consistently supported efforts by the General Assembly to increase the pace of land conservation in Connecticut, and we note that the state is still significantly behind in its goal to have 21% of the state’s land protected by 2021. Land preservation on a significant scale requires consistent funding and passage of this act will critical funds that were intended to help the state achieve our Green Plan open space goals by rescinding a sweep of $5M from this important fund in the current year.

Additionally, we strongly support Senate Bill 1062 “An Act Authorizing Municipal Climate Change and Coastal Resiliency Reserve Funds.” Climate change is an over-arching threat to the birds, other wildlife and to the habitats upon which they depend. Coastal areas of the state are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change due to our ever-rising sea levels. This winter we have seen that even run-of-the-mill winter storms, when coupled with spring tides are causing impacts to our coastal infrastructure and habitats in a way that only serious nor’easters had in the past. This proposal would offer municipalities options for local funding for resiliency projects and allow bold and proactive actions to be taken to better protect critical habitats as well as our human infrastructure.

Senate Bill 76 “An Act Authorizing Municipalities to Restrict the Use of Pesticides in Certain Areas of the Municipality or on Certain Types of Properties”, House Bill 5999 "An Act Concerning Pesticide Regulation in the State” and House Bill 7346 “An Act Prohibiting The Use Of Certain Organophosphates” are also worthy of our strong support. There has been much recent news about the ongoing “insect apocalypse” https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/27/magazine/insect-apocalypse.html. Insect populations all over the world are in decline and one simply has to take a summer drive in the country to see this. Growing up in the 1970’s, I remember that after each such drive a thorough car wash was needed to remove the remains of insects from your headlights and windshields. This no longer happens! While this is anecdotal evidence, it is quite clear that populations of many insects, particularly of pollinators is in decline locally and globally. S.B. 76 would offer municipalities more flexibility to preserve and better manage important habitats for pollinators and other insects. H.B. 5999 would establish a fund and a source for funding for the regulation and inspection of pesticides. The proposed mandated actions by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) are a good idea, if they can be done. Our concerns would be that it may put what seems to be an enormous burden on the agency to set up an electronic reporting and regulating system, implement a monitoring system for pesticide use, plus regulate on-line ordering of pesticides by people not licensed to apply them by October 1st.
HB 7346 prohibits the use of the pesticide chlorpyrifos within the state. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires a label on this pesticide to inform users that “Chlorpyrifos is moderately to very highly toxic to birds…” and that “Chlorpyrifos is very highly toxic to freshwater fish, aquatic invertebrates and estuarine and marine organisms…”, “Chlorpyrifos accumulates in the tissues of aquatic organisms.” Further, “Aquatic and general agricultural uses of chlorpyrifos may be extremely poisonous to wildlife and honeybees…” With such cautions required, it would be highly prudent to prohibit this toxic, persistent and bio-accumulative pesticide within Connecticut.

Last but certainly not least we strongly support House Bill 5312 “An Act Concerning Vegetation Management within Utility Protection Zones”. While we certainly understand the public safety and infrastructure reliability issue that require proper maintenance of utility protection zones, it is also important to provide adequate notice and to foster collaborative efforts with landowners when planning to do such work along utility right of ways, particularly those that fall within private, municipal or NGO held lands. The Connecticut Audubon Society is part of a working group concerned with improving habitat quality within power line right of ways. Many suitable, beneficial and cost effective alternatives for powerline corridor management have been developed over years and Connecticut has been a pioneer in implementing these “integrated vegetative management” techniques. Techniques that establish persistent early successional habitats along power line right of ways that both require less annual maintenance and provide critical habitat to a wide variety of birds and other wildlife. Better coordination with landowners in these efforts will allow more landowners to become aware of such techniques and the opportunity to work with utility providers to implement such management practices on their lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to lend our support to these important proposals.

Sincerely,

Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director