



**Testimony of The Connecticut Audubon Society in support of HJ 1 to adopt the Blue Plan, HB 5103 An Act Requiring an Evaluation of the State's Environmental Justice Law and SB 99 To Restrict the use And Distribution Of Polystyrene Products Across the State. February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

The Connecticut Audubon Society thanks the Committee and the sponsors of HJ 1 for proposing this legislative initiative and for the opportunity to support this bill.

The Connecticut Audubon Society strongly supports **HJ 1** to adopt the Long Island Sound Blue Plan. The Blue Plan, a draft of which was completed in 2019, is a marine spatial planning effort that gathered science-based and stakeholder/expert-vetted information to map the most important locations for special ecological features and human uses of Long Island Sound. The effort was overseen by an advisory committee composed of state, municipal, industry and non-profit representatives. For more information on this committee, please see:

[https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2705&pm=1&Q=574830&deepNav\\_GID=1635](https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2705&pm=1&Q=574830&deepNav_GID=1635)).

The plan provides a wealth of information for proponents, opponents, regulators, and other interested parties of future projects on Long Island Sound. By compiling this information into a single source it will greatly aid in planning for future uses of the Sound. This will allow key areas to be recognized and taken into account in order to make better decisions now and in the future.

The Blue Plan is not a new regulatory process. The Blue Plan is a vehicle to more quickly identify key resources for review within existing permitting processes, such as the Connecticut Siting Council or Coastal Zone Management Act. Permit review under these programs will undergo the same general processes, but will now have access to the information and standards contained in the Blue Plan. There will not be an additional Blue Plan permit required.

Through the Blue Plan process, a large amount of information has been compiled on where important ecological features and human uses occur in Long Island Sound. The Connecticut Audubon Society was grateful to have had an opportunity to contribute to this process. This information is presented and made broadly available through the Blue Plan documents, including the Long Island Sound Resource and Use Inventory and online map viewer. Using these tools, stakeholders, project proponents and opponents, and permitting authorities all have the same information to evaluate and substantiate more objective and well-informed decisions.

Please consider approval of this plan as an important planning tool for the future of Long Island Sound.

The Connecticut Audubon Society also strongly supports **HB 5103**, “An Act Requiring an Evaluation of the State’s Environmental Justice Law”. We are a conservation organization who works to protect birds and their habitats through education and advocacy; as such, a significant focus of our education efforts is on working in low-income, environmentally-exploited communities. We also work to educate the general public about statewide conservation issues through our advocacy alerts.

The majority of the environmental degradation issues in our state (and beyond), exist in low-income and urban neighborhoods. We believe the onus is on organizations like ours to educate students of all ages about the inherent ecological value of the places and spaces where they live. In addition to their importance to people, urban habitats are also quite important for birds and other wildlife. In fact, our ~~recent~~ 2018 State of the Birds Report, ~~we focus~~ focused on the importance of urban areas to birds and other wildlife.

Our Science in Nature school education program is our K-12 STEM education program designed specifically for our state's underrepresented students. The majority of the public schools we work with are located in highly urbanized areas, with no safe or easy access to outdoor areas conducive to hands-on environmental education learning related to life and earth sciences. As conservationists focused on habitat restoration, CAS is particularly focused on this need, since these areas have a significant industrial presence, with environmental issues that will require an engaged and scientifically literate community to solve.

Science in Nature's curriculum incorporates environmental justice themes. Our educators discuss with students the history of human use and impact on low-income and urban communities and emphasize the imperative that the solutions to our most pressing conservation issues requires the participation of everyone and that everyone's voice matters. We applaud the sponsors of this bill who recognize, as do we, the importance of inclusive conversations; meaningful public participation from all walks of life, particularly in low-income communities with a history of marginalization. **HB 5103** would make it a requirement for all members of the public to be aware of proposed development and opportunities for those members to have an informed say about what happens to their communities.

We would also like to express our strong support for **SB 99** to restrict the use and distribution of polystyrene products across the state. In the course of our work conserving shorebirds along the coast of Connecticut and at our Coastal Center in Milford we often encounter polystyrene waste. Plastic and polystyrene waste can be detrimental to seabirds and other aquatic life. We support any efforts to reduce such waste in Connecticut.

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

Respectfully submitted,



Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director

*Founded in 1898, the Connecticut Audubon Society is an independent organization that conserves Connecticut's environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state's bird populations and habitats. We own and manage 20 preserves covering almost 3,300 acres in all areas of the state, and we work with landowners to help them manage their land for the benefit of birds and other wildlife.*