



Audubon | CONNECTICUT

Environment Committee - Public Hearing of March 3, 2021

SUPPORT: House Bill No. 6496 - AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN SOIL-RELATED INITIATIVES (Sections 3, 4, and 5)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the National Audubon Society through its affiliate state office, Audubon Connecticut. The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. Our conservation network extends statewide and includes more than 31,000 members, five Connecticut chapters, and many partners along the [Atlantic Flyway](#).

Through land stewardship, science, education and advocacy, we work across the state to preserve habitat and protect bird species that are of state, national, and global concern; and we identify and support Important Bird Areas (IBAs), a hallmark of Audubon's efforts worldwide. It begins with birds, but our mission connects people to a much wider range of issues, such as preventing air and water pollution, reducing pesticide use, promoting land conservation and reducing the impact of global climate change on birds, wildlife, and people.

The strength we derive as part of the National Audubon Society enables us to contribute to a broader conservation strategy—one that recognizes the need to conserve wildlife on a wide geographic scope. See the link below for more information about Audubon nature sanctuaries and centers that are part of a broad network of critical habitats for a host of birds and other wildlife species as well as peaceful respites for people. Our centers serve as community hubs for education, conservation, and engagement with nature.

<https://ct.audubon.org/about-us/centers-sanctuaries-and-chapters>

Sections 3, 4, and 5 – Soil Health:

The Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) included a number of working groups. One of those working groups was the Working and Natural Lands - Wetlands Sub-Group Co-Chaired by Leslie Kane of Audubon Connecticut. That working group made recommendations to the GC3, who in turn made recommendations to the Governor.

The GC3 Phase I Report (Near Term Actions) included Action Item 44: ***Improve soil health practices on all landscapes and off farms through technical assistance and training, education, and outreach, and leveraging federal funding.*** The proposed legislation (sections 3 to 5) is a first step implementing this GC3 action item.

Soil health is essential to maintain and restore these ecosystem services and is an important component of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency planning. The USDA defines “soil health” to mean the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Healthy soils allow for better water filtration thus providing for better water quality. And, better infiltration balances the water cycle moderating the impacts of flood and drought. From forests to farmlands to wetlands, soils are a critical component of the carbon cycle and healthy soil can sequester carbon to help mitigate (and adapt) to climate change.

Sections 3 to 5 of House Bill No. 6496 takes an initial step to advance soil health by expanding the authority of the commissioner of energy and environmental protection and the soil and water conservation districts / boards to consider soil health.

For many years the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has been asked to do more with less funding. The need for adequate staffing for DEEP becomes even more critical as DEEP works to advance our understating of Connecticut’s natural resources--and the ecosystems services that those natural resources provide—as our climate continues to change. Consideration of soil health is one of those areas that could provide huge dividends to reduce the rate and impact of climate change. We should invest in DEEP staff to pursue these dividends.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please contact Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Connecticut, National Audubon Society at 203.668.6685 or at Robert.LaFrance@Audubon.org.