Testimony of the Connecticut Audubon Society to the Environment Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly in strong support of H.B. No. 5141 An Act Concerning The Protection Of Certain Fish Species.

February 22, 2022

THE CONNECTICUT Audubon SOCIETY

The Connecticut Audubon Society thanks the Committee and the sponsors of **H.B. No. 5141 An Act Concerning The Protection Of Certain Fish Species** for proposing this important resolution and for the opportunity to express our strong support this important measure. Through our four years of monitoring Osprey along the coast of Long Island Sound we have anecdotally observed that adults returning to their nesting territories in March from Brazil are largely dependent upon the early spring runs of Blueback Herring and Alewives for sustenance until large numbers of Menhaden arrive, about the time Osprey eggs begin to hatch. Meanwhile, as Common and Roseate Terns return to the largest tern colony in the Northern Hemisphere at Great Gull Island and their satellite colony at the Falkner Island Unit of the McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, they require large amounts of Sand Lance to successfully fledge their young.

Early spring migratory herring runs also coincide with the spring migration of Northern Gannets and Common Loons through the Sound and the hatching of egrets and herons on our offshore islands. Their concentrated active feeding here is certainly focused on these herring runs, as the migration of other forage fish species in the Sound does not occur until later in the spring.

All of these resident and migratory fish play an important role in the food web of Long Island Sound and are a major forage species for not only migratory water birds, but also predatory fish species such as striped bass, bluefish and weakfish, as we as marine mammals that are repopulating Long Island Sound waters.

"Forage fish species" serve many important ecological functions that must take precedence over their commercial value. The important ecosystem role of these fish is not simply spread equally across the species range but is also a function of high abundance stages during periods when adults gather in mass to migrate upstream to spawn and again when young-of-the-year migrate downstream to the ocean. These river mouth and coastal aggregations provide dense food accumulations for many coastal birds such as Osprey and Common Loon. These food patches reduce the energy needs of these and other water birds to search for prey and are clearly critical for fledging their young.

The Connecticut Audubon Society strongly supports any effort to restore populations of forage fish in Long Island Sound. Many of our migratory and estuarine fish species are of global conservation concern and the Sound holds the potential to serve as key habitat for such fish species as Bluefish, Little Skate and Striped Bass and once again regularly support cetaceans such as Humpback Whale, Atlantic White-sided Dolphin and Harbor Porpoise. The economic benefits of a robust recreational fishery and nature exploration industry on Long Island Sound gives us extra incentive and responsibility to ensure that this special waterbody continues to improve and provide us with more wondrous sightings as the years go on. Forage fish populations are key to any hopes of such a thriving estuary.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important matter.

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 21 preserves covering more than 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.

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