

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ERIN M. CROTTY
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FOR THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WATER AND WILDLIFE
UNITES STATES SENATE
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Good afternoon Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Duckworth, and Members of the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife. Thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate bill 675 the “Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act.” I would like to especially thank Senator Gillibrand from my home state of New York for being a champion for our shared environment and for sponsoring this critically important legislation.

My name is Erin Crotty and I am the Executive Director of Audubon New York and Vice President of the National Audubon Society. Audubon’s mission is to protect birds and the places they need to survive. Our growing wingspan of one million passionate and active members, a strong National Office, two statewide Audubon offices in New York and Connecticut with 18 sanctuaries and nature centers, thirty-three local Audubon Chapters, and thousands of annual visitors and volunteers have worked for decades to protect and restore Long Island Sound and its watershed (“the Sound”). Audubon connects our vast and powerful network along the migratory flyways of the Americas through science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation programs. At its best, Audubon’s network unites to tackle big challenges facing birds that cannot be solved by any single part of the network alone – like protecting the Sound for birds and people. We help people throughout our vast and beautiful country satisfy the universal need to make a difference. My testimony is on behalf of One Audubon and it is my sincere hope that my testimony today makes a difference.

America’s coastal habitat is critically important to the survival of birds. Protecting and restoring coastal habitat is one of the five conservation strategies of Audubon’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan: Extending our Conservation Reach Together. We focus on the most threatened and iconic bird species that rely on coastal habitats—estuaries, islands, beaches, and the marine environment—throughout the hemisphere and work to strengthen their populations while preserving the places they need to survive throughout their lives. The work needed to accomplish this goal also protects coastal communities against the threat of sea-level rise due to a changing climate.

The Significance of the Sound to Birds, Other Wildlife & People

The Sound is a *globally significant* ecosystem for birds, fish and other wildlife. It is a 1,320 square mile estuary of the Atlantic Ocean and borders 600 miles of the New York and Connecticut coastline. The Sound supports 54 Important Bird Areas (“IBAs”). Identifying IBAs is a collaborative effort of 19 partners throughout the world to identify, monitor, and protect the most important places for birds. 14 of the Sound’s IBAs are identified as global meaning they are places of critical conservation value at the international scale, supporting bird species of global conservation concern and/or significant numbers of birds. (Please see the map of the Sound’s IBAs at the end of this testimony.)

The Sound is home to one of the most important tern nesting sites *on Earth*, Great Gull Island, with approximately 10,000 pairs of Common Terns and more than 1,000 pairs of the federally endangered

Roseate Tern. The Sound supports over 1,200 species of invertebrates, 170 species of fish, and dozens of species of migratory birds, including the Roseate Tern and federally threatened Piping Plover and Red Knot.

23 million people (7% of the total US population) live within 50 miles of the Sound and it is five miles from the heart of the country's most populated city – New York. The Sound generates an impressive \$9.4 billion (2015) annually to the regional economy. The Sound is an estuary of national significance.

The Importance of the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act

It is for these reasons that Audubon strongly supports the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act (“the Act”) and we are grateful to Senator Gillibrand for sponsoring this critical piece of legislation. The Act authorizes the Long Island Sound program in the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) and the Long Island Stewardship Act through fiscal year 2023. The Act authorizes funding for projects to restore and preserve the Sound and its ecosystems, including much needed funding for upgrades to wastewater treatment plants, wetlands protection and restoration, and non-point source control and abatement. The Act also adds to the Long Island Sound Study Office the responsibility to study environmental impacts, including the impacts of sea-level rise and the development and implementation of adaptation strategies, on the Sound watershed; conduct planning; develop and implement public education strategies; and conduct monitoring to ensure the projects and programs are working effectively. The Act requires a biennial report to Congress, an annual crosscutting budget, and critical federal agency coordination. Finally, the Act authorizes up to \$40 million annually for grants to support the Sound's Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) and up to \$25 million annually for grants to procure and enhance sites within the Sound's watershed.

The Act is a common sense approach to modern estuary protection and helps meet the federal government's share of the funding needed to further improve water quality, protect and improve habitat, educate and involve the public, and ensure sustainable and resilient communities based on sound science and inclusive management. The federal funding authorized under the Act will be leveraged with other federal, state, local, and private investment. On average, the estuaries of the National Estuaries Program, of which Long Island Sound Study is one, raises \$18 for every \$1 provided by the EPA. That is a significant and meaningful leverage ratio. Oftentimes, this federal funding is the driver for projects moving forward.

While the Health of the Sound Has Improved, Threats Continue

As stated above, the Act is linked to the Sound's CCMP. CCMPs are long-term plans that contain actions to address water quality and living resources challenges and priorities which are identified at the local level through stakeholder engagement. For nearly 30 years, this comprehensive effort has resulted in measurable improvement to the Sound's health and Audubon has been there every step of the way. Water quality has improved, habitat has been restored, and open spaces protected which has resulted in the Sound teaming with wildlife and people.

As of 2016, both Connecticut and New York have nearly attained the goal of reducing nitrogen by 58.5%. Over 1,750 acres of habitat in New York and Connecticut were restored from 1998 to 2015 – that equates to an area nearly the size of Delaware. 335 miles of migratory corridors in rivers for fish passage have been opened up. Millions of people have been engaged and educated about the

importance of the Sound to their quality of life. “Dead” zones – oxygen-depleted areas – are shrinking. Menhaden are returning. Humpback whales and dolphins have been seen in the Sound in recent years. Thousands of terns and Laughing Gulls gather in the Sound during fall migration to feast on baitfish. Vast schools of striped bass and bluefish, and even schools of tuna are being pursued by fishermen. Birds that were once rare on the Sound are becoming regular, including Parasitic Jaegers, Northern Gannets and Razorbills. Vast flocks of gulls and Brant, Greater Scaup and Long-tailed Ducks gather in the Sound at this time of year to take advantage of plankton blooms to fatten up for breeding season. Tens of thousands of Semipalmated Sandpipers and other migratory shorebirds gather on the Sound’s shores. Osprey have recovered from the brink of extirpation to hundreds of pairs. Bald Eagles are nesting along the Sound.

Yet, the health of the Sound is still threatened. And, the threats today are more diffuse and challenging than they were 30 years ago. A changing climate, extreme weather events, acidification, nitrogen discharges from stormwater and septic, contaminants leaking from aging and broken infrastructure, harmful algal blooms, brown tide, user conflicts, invasive species, funding needs outpacing available funding, pressure from development as more people flock to our coastal communities, and rising sea levels are literally squeezing out the habitat for birds and other wildlife – these are the challenges facing the Sound today. The collaborative and integrated effort enabled by the Act is more important than ever.

The Sound’s CCMP was updated in 2015 and the vision is one of clean water that is safe to swim in and charged with life; water protected and nourished by coastal wetlands, publicly accessible, litter-free beaches and preserves, and undeveloped islands; abundant and diverse wildlife; flourishing commercial fisheries; harbors accessible to the boating community; and a regional consciousness and a way of life that protects and sustains the ecosystem. This vision is linked to a plan of action (the CCMP) for clean waters and healthy watersheds, thriving habitats and abundant wildlife, sustainable and resilient communities, and sound science and inclusive management. The Act helps us – governments at all levels, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (including Audubon), and the public – reach that vision.

Examples of Audubon New York & Connecticut On-the-Ground in the Sound

Audubon New York is an active player in the protection of the Sound and our field efforts are focused on reducing threats to, and increasing populations of, priority bird species. Our experienced staff protect priority nesting birds by installing fencing around nesting areas, building nest enclosures to keep predators out, and monitoring sites for birds, threats, and nesting success. We help track progress toward meeting the recovery goals for federally listed endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Building from our stewardship efforts, we engage and educate the public through our Be a Good Egg campaign. Be a Good Egg integrates beach outreach, community education, and engagement in conservation activities to reduce threats to the Sound’s coastal habitats. Be a Good Egg changes public perceptions and behaviors to reduce threats to nesting and resting shorebirds. We reach tens of thousands of people through our communication channels, including public and school programming. We secure thousands of pledges from people committing to share and respect the shore and engage volunteers to assist with stewardship activities and actions that directly benefit the Sound’s birds and

the places they need to survive. Be a Good Egg connects beach users to nature and encourages them to be active players in the protection of the Sound.

Working with governmental and non-governmental partners, Audubon Connecticut has worked to permanently preserve more than 2,000 acres of critical coastal habitat since the turn of the 21st century. Key actions include protecting critical buffers and watershed protection habitats of global IBAs (East River Marsh in Guilford, Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison, Menunketesuck Island and the Salt Meadow Unit of Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Westbrook and Barn Island Wildlife Management Area in Stonington).

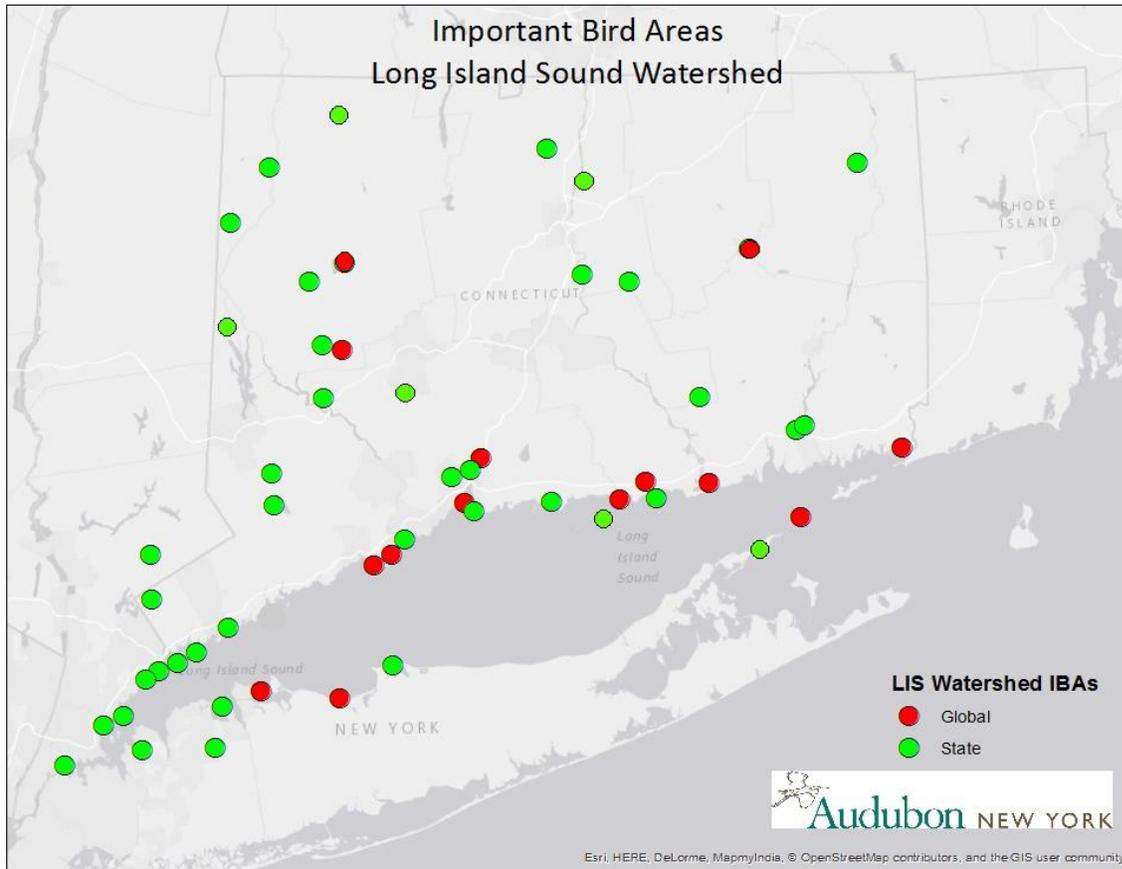
Our staff and more than 200 volunteers work with local, state and federal governments and private landowners at 31 coastal sites where Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers, Least Terns and other coastal waterbirds nest or gather for migration to ensure nesting success while preserving public access. Audubon volunteers contributed more than 4,000 hours towards monitoring and stewarding of Piping Plovers and Least Terns along the coast of Connecticut in 2016 alone and contributed to record breaking breeding success for Piping Plovers and American Oystercatchers. In 2015, there were a record number of 62 pairs of Piping Plovers that produced an all-time high of 116 fledged chicks. In 2016, we had an all-time high count of nesting pairs of both oystercatchers and plovers -- 63 pairs each.

The National Estuaries Program Works – Defend its Funding

In closing, I would like to point out that the nation's National Estuaries Program (NEP) faces an uncertain future as the Trump Administration has reportedly proposed to eliminate funding for EPA's Categorical Grants. Audubon and many partners believe this includes the 28 estuaries of the NEP, including the Sound. The NEP works from the northwestern shores of Alaska and Oregon, down to the Gulf Coast with estuaries in Alabama and Mississippi and all along the eastern shores from Florida to Maine.

The NEP is a cost-effective, non-regulatory program established by Congress in 1987 that harnesses the power of on-the-ground stakeholders working hard to protect and restore estuaries by providing them a structure to collaborate and develop and implement a long-term plan to guide their efforts: the CCMP. Over one-half of our country's population lives within 100 miles of coasts and more and more people are moving there. With a leverage ratio of 18:1 and \$4.2 billion leveraged with \$230 million in EPA grants from 2003 to 2013, the NEP has proven to be highly efficient and effective. Audubon strongly encourages Congress to resist this short-sighted effort to cut funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Help us make a difference for the birds, other wildlife, and people that rely on the Sound for survival and a high quality of life by taking action on S. 675 the "Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act." Thank you again for your consideration.



Important Bird Areas in New York (north shore from east to west)		Status
1	Great Gull Island, Southold	Global
2	Orient Point to Plum Island, Southold	State
3	Crane Neck to Misery Point, Brookhaven	State
4	Nissequogue River Watershed/Smithtown Bay, Smithtown	Global
5	Huntington and Northport Bays, Huntington, Northport	Global
6	Oyster Bay Area, Oyster Bay	State
7	Muttontown Preserve, Hempstead	State
8	Little Neck Bay to Hempstead Harbor, North Hempstead	State
9	North Brother/South Brother Islands, New York City	State
10	Pelham Bay Park, New York City	State
11	Huckleberry Island, New York City	State
12	Marshlands Conservancy, Rye	State
13	Edith G. Read Wildlife Sanctuary, Rye	State
14	Butler Sanctuary, MT Kisco	State

Recognized Important Bird Areas in Connecticut

1	Aton Forest, Inc.	State
2	Audubon Center Bent of the River	State
3	Audubon Greenwich (including Quaker Ridge)	State
4	Bafflin Sanctuary Complex	State
5	Barn Island Wildlife Management Area	Global
6	Connecticut College Arboretum, Waterford	State
7	Couch Hill Preserve	State
8	Cove Island Park	State
9	District of Willimantic Chimney Swift Roosts	Global
10	East Rock Park	State
11	Falkner Island Unit of McKinney NWR	State
12	Good Hill Farm Preserve	State
13	Great Captain's Island	State
14	Greenwich Point Park	State
15	Hammonasset Beach State Park	Global
16	Lighthouse Point Park	State
17	Mamacoke Island	State
18	Menunketesuck and Duck Islands	State
19	Milford Point/Wheeler Marsh	Global
20	Naugatuck State Forest	State
21	Northwest Park	State
22	Quinnipiac River Tidal Marsh	Global
23	Salt Meadow Unit of McKinney NWR	Global
24	Sandy Point	Global
25	Silver Sands State Park and Charles Island	State
26	Station 43	State
27	Stratford Great Meadows Area	Global
28	TNC's Devil's Den, Weston	State
29	Topsmead State Forest	State
30	West River Memorial & Edgewood Park	State
31	White Memorial Foundation	Global
32	Wimisink Preserve,	State
33	Woodbury Chimney Swift Roost	Global
34	Great Meadows	State
35	Lyme Forest Block	State
36	Macedonia Forest Block	State
37	Meshomasic Forest Block	State
38	Miles Wildlife Sanctuary and Housatonic State Forest Block	State
39	Mouth of the Connecticut River	Global
40	Shepaug Forest Block	State