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Audubon Society of Rhode Island

April 5, 2021

Representative Joseph Solomon
Chair, House Committee on Corporations
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: Audubon Society of Rhode Island Supports H6169, Renewable Energy Resource Projects

Dear Chairman Solomon and members of the House Committee on Corporations,

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and our 17,000 members thank Representative Speakman, Ruggiero, Cortvriend, Carson, Donovan, Tanzi, Ajello, Morales, and Potter for sponsoring this important legislation. We urge you to pass this bill to the floor for a vote.

Audubon supports rapid deployment of renewable energy projects to quickly transition the state off fossil fuel. However, we also recognize the critical importance of forested lands as habitat for birds and wildlife and for its role in carbon sequestration and we are concerned about the proliferation of large solar projects on previously forested lands.

Rhode Island's renewable energy laws are working well and solar projects are being built throughout the state. While the Renewable Energy Growth Program only allows projects up to 5 MW (20 acres) and the Net Metering statute caps projects at 10 MW (about 50 acres), projects are being built that exceed that size by developers building multiple projects on adjacent parcels.

EcoRI published a story in December 2019 that showed a map of solar projects in the town of Hopkinton.¹ The map includes several approved projects that exceed the 10 MW limit: 20.34 MW project that covers 44.87 acres, a 15 MW project on 68 acres, an 18.8 MW project on 60 acres and others. A more recent ecoRI article² from January 2020 describes an in-process 38.4 MW solar project in North Smithfield. The development has been split into 9 entities, each less than 9 MW, as required by state law. But the entities are on contiguous parcels, creating one massive solar project.

This bill will eliminate the co-location of solar projects in green-field locations, while allowing these larger projects in preferred, already disturbed sites like landfills, brownfields, parking lots, etc. The bill references the definition of preferred locations used in the recent Office of Energy Resources study³

¹ <https://www.ecori.org/renewable-energy/2019/12/13/hopkinton-solar-development-gets-mapped-out>

² <https://www.ecori.org/renewable-energy/2020/6/22/north-smithfield-approves-ris-largest-solar-farm>

³ https://www.synapse-energy.com/sites/default/files/Solar_Siting_Opportunities_for_Rhode_Island_19-076.pdf

that found ample opportunity for development in these areas. The change is applied to both the Net Metering statute and the Renewable Energy Growth Program statute.

We believe this is a small but important step to take to eliminate large solar developments in Rhode Island's forested lands.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Meg Kerr".

Meg Kerr
Senior Director of Policy