



Audubon Society of Rhode Island

13 April 2026
Maxwell McFarland, Director of Advocacy
Audubon Society of Rhode Island

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 8144 – An Act Relating to Capital Development Program -- 2026 Bond Referenda

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island – representing our 17,000 members and supporters – I am writing to express our support for H8144, including essential funding in the 2027 Green Economy Bond for conservation funding.

The Green Bond as initially proposed included important funding for the Resilient Rhody Infrastructure Fund, Brownfields remediation, and Narragansett Bay Watershed Fund, but no funding for land and water conservation programs. H8144 includes the much needed \$10 million to fund these efforts.

Audubon Society of Rhode Island protects nearly 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat all across the state, and was recently awarded \$200,000 to protect 23 acres along the Hunt River on the border of East Greenwich and North Kingstown. Half of the \$400,000 acquisition costs of this riparian habitat came from local donors to match the state grant. This land is not only important for wildlife but also provides for nature-based flooding mitigation for both towns. This award represents the last funds from the Local Open Space Fund from the 2022 Green Bond. Without additional funding added in the 2027 Green Economy Bond, Audubon will no longer be able to acquire future lands for permanent protection.

Organizations and municipalities rely on Green Bond dollars to leverage nearly 2:1 in matching funds, as in the example above, to protect forests, farms, and waters that benefit every Rhode Islander. Without this funding, protecting Rhode Island's lands becomes far more difficult.

Forests and open spaces filter and clean water, keep communities healthy, cool our cities, and store carbon — which is key to tackling climate change. Recent polling shows Rhode Islanders broadly support funding for water, wildlife, and forests, and 85% do not see land conservation and affordable housing as conflicting — we can do both.

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We urge support of H8144 and the \$17.5 million proposal – with \$3 million for the State Open Space Program to conserve lands of significance, \$3 million for Outdoor Recreation Grants to improve access to outdoor recreation, \$2 million for Farmland Preservation to preserve important Rhode Island farms, and \$2 million for the Local Open Space Program to protect valuable open spaces within our communities.

With this funding, organizations like the Audubon Society of Rhode Island can continue to protect the places we love while leveraging outside dollars and strengthening local economies across the state.

Sincerely,

Maxwell McFarland, Director of Advocacy

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