



Over 100 Years of Education, Conservation & Advocacy  
**Audubon Society of Rhode Island**

February 16, 2022

Representative Marvin Abney  
Chair, House Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02908

**Re: Audubon Society of Rhode Island Supports Article 5, Question 3 – Green Economy Bond**

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance,

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island. Audubon supports Article 5, Question 3 - Green Economy and Clean Water Bond and urges passage.

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island was founded in 1897 and has been in continuous operation since that time. We are a private, independent, membership-supported organization devoted to improving the use, management and protection of all natural resources and the environment. Audubon has 17,000 members and supporters and is the state's largest private landowner, conserving over 9,500 acres for open space and wildlife habitat. We have consistently advocated for clean water, open space and green economy bonds which are strongly supported by the Rhode Island public.

The \$38M investment proposed in this bond provides essential funding for Rhode Island's very successful environmental programs. We fully support state investments in the small business energy program administered by the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (\$5M), Narragansett Bay and watershed restorations (\$3M), which includes support for jobs and stormwater management and green infrastructure, and local recreation for improvements to community parks and recreational facilities (\$2M) because they benefit communities throughout the State.

We are particularly supportive of the proposals earmarked for the municipal resilience program (\$16M) also managed by the RI Infrastructure Bank, and the funding proposed for forest and habitat restoration (\$3M), open space conservation (\$5M), and the cleaning up of former industrial sites or brownfields (\$4M).

The municipal resiliency funds will be directed at high priority projects identified by cities and towns who participate in the RI Infrastructure Bank's climate resiliency program. In previous years, we helped facilitate municipal resiliency workshops and are enthusiastic about the success of this program that has provided grants to implement 28 priority projects across the 26 communities that have participated. The municipal resilience program continues to provide critical community resiliency and safety benefits, including stormwater management improvements as we face increased flooding and more frequent and intense storms with the growing climate change crisis.

We anticipate that the funds allocated to forest and open protection will be deployed to protect essential forested lands that provide habitat for birds and other wildlife, improve air and water quality, protect watersheds, prevent soil erosion, and mitigate climate change. In addition, the funds proposed for remediation of brownfield sites as such sites are preferred areas to develop solar and help address the solar siting concerns and prevent further loss and fragmentation of forests.

Lastly, as we strongly support all of the proposed investments in open space, outdoor recreation, land revitalization, green energy, climate resilience, forest habitat and wildlife protection, and water quality, we would also like to echo the ARPA recommendations submitted by members of the Environment Council of Rhode Island, including Audubon. We have attached for reference the Environment Council's revised request for federal funding to implement climate and environmental priorities that align with the FY2023 budget proposal and our Act On Climate goals. Recommendations include dedicated ARPA funds to conserve forests and open space through matching funds for conservation easements and conservation opportunity mapping.

Audubon respectfully encourages the passage of this bond so it can go to the Rhode Island voters for consideration. We would also like to take this opportunity to comment to express strong support for the nine critical environmental enforcement and climate FTEs proposed for DEM that will be up for consideration at a later date.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Priscilla De La Cruz  
Senior Director of Government Affairs