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Dear Senator:

Thank you for your support of the proposed PROTECT grant program (Section 1407) in the America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019. The National Audubon Society supports the PROTECT program – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation – which would help communities and states take steps to make transportation infrastructure more resilient in the face of floods, sea level rise, and changing weather conditions. More resilient infrastructure would help improve community safety while offering financial and environmental benefits to birds, wildlife, and their habitats. We thank you for your support in establishing this cost-effective and beneficial program.

Coastal transportation infrastructure faces significant challenges from sea level rise and more intense storms. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates that nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population lives in developed coastal areas threatened by rising seas, erosion and storm hazards. NOAA notes that sea level rise threatens infrastructure that is necessary for local jobs and regional economies. Many coastal towns and cities are also experiencing a significant increase in flooding that accompanies routine high tides. NOAA has found that high-tide flooding has increased in the United States by 100 percent since 30 years ago, further exposing infrastructure to repetitive damage.

Inland communities also face risks from riverine flooding and storms that threaten vitally important infrastructure. As the National Weather Service notes, flooding is a coast-to-coast threat to the United States and its territories in all months of the year.

The PROTECT grant program would provide federal grants for resilience improvement on a state and municipal level. The grants would support community planning and implementation of methods to reduce the exposure of infrastructure to natural hazards. The program would also benefit the environment by supporting the use of natural infrastructure to improve resiliency, including restoring wetlands to absorb flood waters, installing “living shorelines” like oyster reefs to reduce erosion, and creating greenways to provide natural buffers between infrastructure and waterways. Natural infrastructure, such as coastal wetlands, are estimated by NOAA to provide more than \$23 billion in storm protection services every year.

Specifically, the PROTECT program would help benefit both resiliency and the environment by:

- Providing planning grants to communities to help them assess vulnerabilities to current and future weather events, natural disasters and changing conditions, including sea level rise.
- Offering resilience improvement grants to protect existing infrastructure, including by using natural infrastructure to protect and enhance transportation assets while improving ecosystem conditions.
- Ensuring that resilience improvement grants can be used for relocating infrastructure out of the floodplain and acquiring the remaining property as open space, and restoring aquatic ecosystems that are connected to a transportation improvement.

- Incentivizing community and state participation by reducing the non-federal cost share of a project that is developed through a Resilience Improvement Plan and incorporated into an approved city or long-range statewide transportation plan.

The PROTECT program would help reduce the vulnerability of transportation infrastructure to costly and destructive acts of nature. It would also help communities and states plan for future risks, and employ nature-based methods to reduce flood and storm damages. These steps would save federal, state and local disaster-related expenditures while enhancing public safety and providing environmental benefits. On behalf of the National Audubon Society's more than 1.4 million members, we thank you for your support of the PROTECT program within the America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019.

Sincerely,

Karen Hyun, Ph.D.  
Vice President, Coastal Conservation  
National Audubon Society