

Now is The Time to Invest in Bird Conservation

A proposal for federal conservation spending in Fiscal Year 2021



Red-tailed Hawk
Photo: Jim West/Audubon Photographer Awards



Belted Kingfisher
Photo: Bob Feldman/Audubon Photographer Awards



American Oystercatcher
Photo: Jesse Gordon, Audubon Photographer Awards

Congress Must Pass a Bird Recovery Budget

IT'S TIME TO INCREASE AVIAN APPROPRIATIONS

Since 1970, we've lost 3 billion of America's birds and two-thirds of our remaining birds are now at risk of extinction due to climate change. The birds we've lost are not just threatened or endangered species, but common birds found in communities and backyards across the country. These bird declines are due to human activity, including habitat loss and degradation and direct mortality, including from industrial hazards. In addition, increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases are disrupting natural cycles and causing temperatures to rise across the globe. This is the fifth alarm in a five-alarm fire that is crystal clear to the 48 million birders in the country.

But birders aren't the only ones who should care about these staggering figures. Birds are important indicator species, meaning that severe declines in bird health tell us about future threats facing people and communities. Bipartisan conservation projects and programs provide tangible, scientific solutions to recover our bird populations as well as provide cleaner water and air plus natural barriers for communities in the wake of more frequent and severe catastrophic weather events. With the Administration implementing rollback after rollback of our bedrock environmental laws, increasing federal conservation investments is a critical backstop.

The National Audubon Society is proposing the following federal Fiscal Year 21 funding priorities to address critical threats facing birds and to start to reverse this devastating trend. Prioritizing full funding for the critical programs below will ensure birds have the habitat and resources they need to thrive, now and into the future. We urge the Administration and Congress to reject any cuts or policy riders, past or future, that would harm birds or contribute to climate change and instead deliver a budget that protects and strengthens our environment and the ecosystems birds and humans rely on. The committee must also reject past or future policy riders that harm birds including language preventing listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse if that's found to be scientifically necessary. By doing so, we will create a better future for birds and people.

We must prioritize our bedrock bird programs and enhancing resilience through natural infrastructure (\$1.12 billion)

- \$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA)
 - Since 2002, the NMBCA has been an effective matching grant program to fund projects that conserve neotropical migratory birds, those that breed in or migrate through the United States and Canada and spend the non-breeding season in Latin America and the Caribbean where over 4 billion birds representing over 386 species spend their winters.
- \$2 million for Shorebird Flyway Plans
 - This program provides US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) funding for projects in Central and South America to protect the habitat of migratory birds that urgently need conservation action along the Atlantic and Pacific flyways. This program ensures focused conservation action to protect and restore necessary habitats and reduce threats to prevent shorebird species from becoming threatened or endangered.
- \$1.5 million for the Migratory Bird Program National Nongame Bird Plan
 - This funding would provide leadership for migratory bird conservation with specific emphasis on birds of conservation concern. This program provides coordination of conservation business plans and strategies that are essential to addressing the USFWS's priority on birds of conservation concern.
- \$586 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System
 - This network of lands and waters provides opportunities for fish, wildlife, and plant restoration. Funding to protect the ecosystems and resources provided through land management, invasive species removal and other activities in the system are important for birds and bird survival.
- At least \$139.5 million for the Global Environment Facility and at least \$37.5 million for the Inter-American Foundation
 - These programs are extremely important for integrating societal, economic, and biodiversity needs to stem the loss of bird species and biodiversity while improving the quality of life for people in Latin America and the Caribbean. These programs enable the creation of full lifecycle stewardship essential for saving migratory species like the Cerulean Warbler, Western Sandpiper, and Least Tern.
- At least \$45 million for Coastal Zone Management Grants, at least \$33 million for the Oceans and Coastal Security Fund (Title IX Fund), and at least \$27.5 million for the National Estuarine Research Reserve System
 - These programs within the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are important to protecting, researching, and restoring coastal habitat. These programs enhance areas like wetlands, barrier islands, and living shorelines that benefit birds like American Oystercatchers and Red Knots. In addition, these programs fund projects that buffer storm damage, absorb floodwaters, and prepare coastal areas for resilience in the face of sea level rise.
- \$50 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)
 - The NAWCA is a highly successful program that has significantly benefitted birds, other wildlife, and people for 30 years. It has funded nearly 3,000 projects that have positively impacted 30 million acres, and its 6,200 partners have contributed more than \$3.5 billion to match \$1.75 billion in grants, making it a wise investment for our wetlands.
- At least \$13.75 million for Coastal Programs in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
 - Under this program, the U.S. FWS works with states and other partners to support long-term wetland conservation that increases coastal resilience for birds, wildlife, and communities.

- At least \$175 million for Watershed and Flood Prevention at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - Under this program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) within the USDA works with local sponsors to facilitate the planning and construction of small watershed improvements, including agricultural water management, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, water conservation, forest health, recreational development, and more. These are locally driven, partnership projects that address critical community needs with multiple benefits. Since its inception, the program has invested over \$6 billion from more than 2,000 projects nationwide, conserving 1.8 million acre-feet of water, and protecting or enhancing over 47,000 miles of stream corridors, 2.5 million acres of lakes and reservoirs, and 280,000 acres of wetlands.
- Full funding for Farm Bill Conservation Programs within the USDA
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
 - RCPP promotes innovative conservation approaches that improve the health of working landscapes and rivers through partnership-driven regional projects that address multiple natural resource concerns on a meaningful scale.
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - EQIP promotes the voluntary application of land use practices that maintain or improve the condition of natural resources, including grassland health, water quality, and wildlife habitat.
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
 - CREP provides incentives to growers, including an annual rental rate, who remove environmentally sensitive land from production and establish permanent resource conserving plant species, typically for 10-15 years.
 - All of these programs support bird habitat and land management to advance large-scale solutions that benefit both landowners and the environment.

We must enhance and protect the places and habitats birds need, now and into the future (\$2.82 billion)

- \$900M for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
 - Since 1964, LWCF has protected parks, important wildlife habitat, and areas of cultural significance in all fifty states and almost every county. Over its decades-long history, the program has protected many vital places for birds, including Florida's Everglades, California's Point Reyes National Sea Shore, and Golden-winged Warbler habitat in North Carolina. Full funding will ensure that more projects to protect and improve conservation throughout the country become a reality. This popular, bipartisan program represents that largest source of federal funds for diverse conservation and recreation access needs.
- \$250 million for Everglades restoration efforts within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan created a goal to support restoration efforts with a minimum of \$200 million from the state partner and \$200 million from the federal partner. For the first time, both federal and state partners are stepping up to and exceeding this challenge. As a number of key restoration projects near the finish line, this funding will help provide unprecedented progress and improve habitat for birds that help define restoration success like Roseate Spoonbills.
- At least \$510.28M for Geographic Programs and \$26.5 million for the National Estuary Program within the EPA
 - The EPA's Geographic and National Estuary Programs both protect resources and habitats necessary for bird survival and are of geographic interest to Audubon. Many of the Geographic and National Estuary Programs overlap with places where Audubon has on the ground restoration and research, including in the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay, the Long Island Sound, the Puget Sound, South Florida, the San Francisco Bay, and more. These programs help support Audubon's commitment to science and conservation.
 - \$350 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)
 - Included in the EPA Geographic Programs is funding for Great Lakes restoration through the GLRI. Earlier in 2019, the GLRI Action Plan III was released by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which includes a new focus on breeding marsh birds after Audubon advocates articulated the importance of Great Lakes coastal wetlands for birds like Black Terns. This [robust federal investment will](#) help meet new goals while continuing to ensure strong clean water protections so essential to successful Great Lakes restoration. Funding for this successful, bipartisan effort is intended to ramp up to the original allocation of \$475 million annually by fiscal year 2026.

- \$10 million to support the Delaware River Conservation Act
 - The Delaware River Basin Restoration Plan was created to lead conservation and restoration effort across the Delaware River Watershed, which encompasses more than 13,500 square miles of land across four states, provides crucial ecosystem, recreational and commercial services, and supplies more than 13.5 million people with clean drinking water. [Record-level funding for this program](#) through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will result in enhanced conservation for birds like Belted Kingfishers and Northern Harriers.
- At least \$57.3 million for Habitat Conservation and Restoration within the NOAA
 - NOAA’s Habitat Conservation and Restoration Program works to conserve habitat to boost fish populations. Many of the habitats that fish need, birds use, too, such as wetlands, rivers, eelgrass, and more.
- At least \$33 million for Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) within the Army Corps of Engineers:
 - The UMRR program is committed to ensuring the viability and vitality of the Upper Mississippi River System's diverse and significant fish and wildlife resources and supports key bird habitat along the Mississippi flyway. This systemic program provides a well-balanced combination of habitat restoration activities, along with monitoring and research.
- At least \$948M for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and at least \$56M for National Marine Sanctuaries and Protected Areas
 - These programs are important to shorebird and seabird habitat and prey. The NMFS works to ensure sustainable fisheries, recovery and conservation of protected resources, and healthy ecosystems, benefitting coastal communities, fishermen, and marine organisms. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries protects over 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. Marine protected areas are key to providing habitats for seabirds, fish, and other marine life that benefit coastal communities and economies.
- Support for Projects and Programs that address water scarcity in the Arid West
 - Audubon’s *Water and Birds in the Arid West* report highlighted how millions of birds rely on water and wetlands in the Colorado River and the network of Saline lakes across the Intermountain West for their survival. Programs that improve water conservation efforts benefit birds and also secure drinking water for more than 40 million people.
- \$16 million for Beneficial Use of Dredged Material (BUDM) pilot projects
 - Dredging is an excavation activity to remove excess material from waterways to ensure safe navigation. This material can then be used to help restore vital habitat for birds and other wildlife and protect communities. The Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to establish a pilot program to use the material from dredging activity to reduce storm damage, promote public safety, restore habitat, enhance shorelines, promote recreation, and reduce disposal costs. Section 1122 also establishes regional beneficial use teams, composed of the Corps and other state, local, and federal agencies, to identify and help implement ten projects for the beneficial use of dredged material. We urge funding for this program which will restore critical habitat for Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and Snowy Plovers.

We must respond to changing climate threats (\$3.58 billion)

- At least \$2.848 billion for the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE)
 - This office supports clean energy research within the Department of Energy (DOE). Included here are the solar program, whose goals include improving photovoltaic technology and grid integration to reduce the cost of solar adoption, and the wind energy program, including offshore wind. Renewable energy, properly sited and managed for bird safety, is key to mitigating climate change, which is the greatest threat facing birds.
- \$428 million for the Advanced Research Projects Agency—Energy (ARPA-E)
 - ARPA-E supports early-stage alternative energy projects that have the potential to transform the energy system. Projects are selected through a competitive application process, and are given funding and guidance with the hopes of overcoming the unique barriers that hinder adoption of new energy technology. New technologies that benefit from the ARPA—E process may be essential for the transition to a clean energy economy needed to slow the causes of climate change.
- At least \$169.5 million for Climate Research within NOAA
 - NOAA provides data, tools, and information to help understand the impacts of climate change. Climate change is an existential threat to birds and people, and increased funding is needed for climate research to address and understand this threat.

- At least \$112 million for energy storage research in DOE's Office of Electricity
 - Energy storage can make renewable energy available around the clock, while also improving the efficiency and resilience of the electric grid. The budget should reflect the scale of the need for research and development of storage technology, including experimenting with early-stage technology and supporting demonstration projects of large-scale systems.
- \$20 million for the Cooperative Watershed Management Act (CWMA)
 - This historically small program helps diverse water interests work collaboratively to develop regional, multi-benefit water solutions for the arid west. Applicants can use funding through Phase 1 of the program to help communities form watershed groups to assess and develop projects that respond to community water needs, and they can use funding through Phase 2 to help fund those projects. Authorized at \$20 million annually, the program has never received more than \$2.25 million annually. With so many successful Phase 1 groups now ready with plans and projects, it is time for Congress to increase funding for CWMA to implement Phase 2 projects.
- \$3.2 million for the EPA South Florida program and \$5.95 million for the USGS Greater Everglades Priority Ecosystem Science Program
 - America's Everglades is the lifeblood of South Florida's environment, economy, and lifestyle. These programs are necessary to sustain and enhance efforts to restore and protect the environment and waters essential to communities in South Florida. Every dollar invested in Everglades restoration returns at least four dollars to the economy.