

# Skagit Audubon Conservation Notes

## January 3, 2023

### **1. 2023 State Legislative Priorities for Audubon Washington**

The Washington State legislative session begins next Monday, January 9. Unless extended, it will finish on April 23. This is an alternate year long session during which the legislators will write and pass the state's two-year budget.

Audubon Washington succinctly states its policy priorities for the session in a one-pager you can read at [2023 audubon legislative priorities one pager 12.2022 0.pdf](#). The first paragraph names the four priorities:

“In 2023, Audubon seeks to advance climate-smart land-use planning, Puget Sound recovery and resilience, and shrub-steppe protection and stewardship. We also support an ambitious \$47.6M funding request by the Washington Department of Wildlife for biodiversity conservation that will have wide-ranging benefits across our state.”

In more detail, the priorities are to:

Update the Growth Management Act (GMA) and Shoreline Master Plans (SMPs) to include climate resilience.

- The GMA does not currently require planning for climate change. A proposed update of GMA would require planning for emission reduction, affordable housing, and climate resilience. A key provision would require future SMPs of cities and counties to address sea level rise.
- Ensure that Climate Commitment Act revenue goes towards climate solutions.
  - The Climate Commitment Act (CCA) sets a price on carbon emissions and generates revenue to invest in climate solutions. The first round of CCA spending will be in the 2023-25 budget. some may seek those funds for other purposes, weakening the ability to address climate change.
  - We need to guard against weakening the law and climate resilience by diverting CCA funds to unrelated purposes.

Create a shoreline assessment program for the Puget Sound including on-the-water photos.

- The Puget Sound shoreline and nearshore are critical habitat for forage fish and the salmon, orca and marine birds that rely on them. Decades of hard armoring have degraded this habitat, yet there is no comprehensive inventory of the extent and location of shoreline armoring.
- Creating a shoreline assessment will provide data, updated every 2 years, on the location of shoreline armor, natural shorelines, and other nearshore conditions and enable tracking of changes over time. It is crucial for assessing progress on Puget Sound recovery goals, assisting in permitting compliance and in the selection of mitigation and restoration sites.

Protect the Shrub-steppe through funding for programs on public and private lands.

- Funding wildlife-friendly fences through the Washington Shrub-steppe Restoration Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI).
- Funding conservation districts to assist in protecting shrub-steppe, through Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) to build capacity for voluntary stewardship of natural resources on private lands.

### Support the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Biodiversity budget request

- Washington is experiencing great losses of biodiversity from habitat loss and climate change, but WDFW lacks the resources to implement conservation for 95% of effected species.
- We support the Department’s \$47.6 M request for biodiversity conservation and \$3.8 M request for climate resilience.

For more detail go to [Policy Priorities in 2023 | Audubon Washington](#). Additional information will be posted at [Advocacy | Audubon Washington](#) as the session gets underway.

\*\* During the legislative session, Audubon Washington will post bill tracking information on these priorities and other bills of interest at [Bill Tracker: 2023 Legislative Session | Audubon Washington](#). Links to bill information will make it easy for you to let legislators know your take on these issues. Audubon’s great strength in Washington State is having 50,000 members, including some in every legislative district, and more chapters (25) than any other conservation group.

## **2. Environmental Priorities Coalition**

Audubon Washington is one of more than twenty conservation groups participating in the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC). The coalition members collectively focus on 3 or 4 priority bills each year during the state legislative session. The EPC priorities, which overlap those of Audubon Washington, are:

- Investing in Climate Action
- Investing in Salmon Habitat
- Planning for a Climate-Friendly Future
- The Washington Recycling and Packaging Act (The WRAP Act)

For details, go to [About — Environmental Lobby Days](#).

The coalition will hold Environmental Lobby Days on February 14, 15, and 16 (virtual or in-person?). For information and to register: [Lobby for Environmental Health and Justice in 2023 \(google.com\)](#). Sign up for EPC’s “Bills to Watch” email bulletin sent weekly during the legislative session: [Bills to Watch - Washington Environmental Council \(wecprotects.org\)](#). The bulletins include links to information about the bills on the Washington Legislature’s website ([Legislature Home \(wa.gov\)](#)), which has an easy way to express your support or opposition.

## **3. Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA) and Governor Inslee’s Budget**

It was disappointing that the very large omnibus bill President Biden signed December 29, 2022, did not include the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act ([H.R. 2773](#) and [S. 2372](#)). Under the coalition “Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife,” many Audubon chapters and National Audubon joined numerous other conservation groups in supporting passage of this bill, which among other things, would provide states with funds to implement their Wildlife Action Plans. RAWA is bipartisan, and its failure to pass was not based on disagreement over policy but rather over budget off-sets to fund it. The bill may have another chance in the new Congress.

State Wildlife Action Plans focus on conserving populations of species at risk and preventing them from declining to the point they merit listing as threatened or endangered. Recovering species at that point is both more difficult and more expensive.

The federal funds from RAWA would have required matching state funds. Audubon Washington's fourth priority for the 2023 state legislative session is to support Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife's (WDFW) request for biodiversity conservation funding. This would provide the match.

Skagit Audubon Vice-President John Farnsworth serves on Washington State's Wildlife Diversity Advisory Committee. In mid-December John wrote:

“The Wildlife Diversity Advisory Council committee I co-chair will be advising on the 2025-2035 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP); in accordance with RAWA funding priorities it will contain a new concentration on landscape conservation concerns, which should track well with federal legislation. However, WDFW's budget approach is to not be dependent on RAWA money, but to view such funding, which has not yet passed congress, as an augmentation to our wildlife diversity budget.

“The primary reason for the WDFW ask of \$47.6M is that our current 2015-2025 SWAP is chronically underfunded, and thus only a fraction of the SWAP is implemented. We spend the great majority of our funds protecting endangered and threatened species and have nothing left over to protect habitat of near-threatened species or other species of environmental concern. This is not an efficient model to manage wildlife diversity, because it is usually less expensive to deal with threats before a species gets to the endangered level.

“What's new about our approach this year is that there is widespread consensus on the \$47.6M ask. The movement toward this began at the Audubon Council of Washington meeting I attended in Sequim at the end of September. ... The unified approach to the current campaign was suggested at our legislature session by the chair of the senate budget committee.”

Unfortunately, Governor Inslee's proposed budget does not include this funding request. The challenge is to persuade legislators to include the funds in the budgets they propose and pass.

### **Issues Needing Action**

Audubon members can advocate for regional and national protection of birds and other wildlife and their habitat by responding to action alerts from Washington Audubon and National Audubon. Enroll in Audubon Washington's Action Network at [Join Our Action Network | Audubon Washington](#) (overwrite with your name and address). The National Audubon website (Advocacy & Action | Audubon) has abundant information on Audubon's numerous current conservation campaigns. Sign up there to receive national alerts ([Join Our Action Network | Audubon](#)). Also see the Audubon Washington blog for information about a variety of interesting and important issues: [AuduBlog | Audubon Washington](#).