

Audubon Washington 2022 State Legislative Priorities

Talking Points

What's at stake

Topline message

Climate change is the number one threat to birds and people in Washington state. We must do our part to reduce planet warming carbon emissions while making sure our communities have the tools they need to create a climate resilient landscape that supports healthy communities for birds and people.

Top Three Priorities

Audubon Washington supports a number of policies this legislative session that will advance Puget Sound recovery, Shrub-steppe protection, and climate action. Talking points for our full agenda are included in this document, but **our top three priorities for legislators are highlighted.**

Climate Change in our Backyards

Audubon's science shows the impacts of climate change on birds right in our backyard. Look up these impacts using our online tool and share concerns about specific species:
<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees#climate2-survival-search>

What we're asking:

1) Ensuring Washington communities are prepared for a changing climate

Updating GMA to include climate resilience

- The GMA is a key policy tool that local Audubon chapters use to advocate for wise land use and land conservation
- The existing GMA doesn't require planning for a changing climate
- An updated GMA under HB 1099 would require counties to plan for emissions reduction, affordable housing, and a climate-resilient landscape
- The legislature almost passed this bill in 2021; they must *finish the job* in 2022 by passing HB 1099

Promoting climate-smart farming in Washington State

- The Sustainable Farms and Fields bill passed in 2020 creates incentives for tackling carbon emissions in the state's agriculture sector and helps farmers adopt more carbon-friendly practices
- Washington's farmers and rural communities are on the front lines of the climate crisis, and the agricultural industry contributes up to 7% of our state's GHG.
- This program allows farmers, and the broader agricultural sector, ways to opt-in to the critical transition to a climate resilient future that benefits all of Washington's birds and people.
- The Legislature should provide the funding necessary to enact the Sustainable Farms and Fields program, which will bring new investments in climate-smart farming across Washington state

Equitable, Well-sited Community Solar

- Despite the increased investments in clean energy development, access to the full benefits of solar energy are not distributed equally, and siting energy remains a challenge - this will take action and intentional investments from the State Legislature
- Current solar energy siting often prioritizes rural areas, which could put native habitat and prime farmland at risk. This also leaves out communities with unfilled energy needs in more urban, low-income areas
- There is great opportunity for utilizing our existing built environment in urban areas, as potential sites for community-owned solar energy sites.
- The Legislature should create a community solar program that improves access, invests in low-income communities, and produces more well-sited solar energy in communities with the greatest need

2) Support Puget Sound recovery

Enhancing shoreline protection and restoration

- The shorelines of Puget Sound are critical habitat for forage fish and the salmon, orcas, and marine birds that rely upon them as a food source
- Decades of nearshore development has severely degraded habitat, reducing prey availability for juvenile salmon and marine birds. Protecting and restoring this habitat is key to aiding Puget Sound recovery and the marine food web
- Improving regulation and permitting of shoreline armoring by the WDFW is critical for protection of forage fish habitat. This program has long been inadequate in tracking unpermitted armoring, in regulating new structures that harm fish and their habitat and in requiring meaningful mitigation of that harm.
- The legislature should address this problem by passing a legislation that would improve data on shoreline conditions, track new and unpermitted

armor, enhance mitigation standards, and require the removal of derelict structures

Allowing Counties to invest in nature

- The State's landmark Conservation Future's Program allows counties to collect, via levy, needed revenue for local land protections, building & maintaining their parks and trails, and other conservation efforts important to birds and people.
- While originally allowing counties to collect up to a ceiling of 6.25 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value, collections have declined in recent years because of the 1% limit on annual levy growth
- Maintaining this limit means counties will continue to miss out on critical funding to support greatly needed habitat restoration projects in the 11 participating counties around the Puget Sound
- The legislature should resolve this issue of interpretation and create an opportunity for increased revenue for Puget Sound conservation and restoration, by clarifying that the Conservation Futures Levy is one of the levies not subject to the 1% limit

3) Protect Washington's remaining shrub-steppe, home to iconic threatened and newly listed endangered bird species

Ensuring the Department of Fish & Wildlife can keep up with the solar energy boom

- Solar energy is booming in eastern Washington, with 40 projects proposed on over 54,000 acres. We expect many more proposals in the coming years, especially with renewed tax credits for clean energy
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is the state agency responsible for assessing the habitat impacts of these proposals but currently has less than one full-time staff devoted to this effort
- The legislature should provide \$400K in funding to ensure WDFW can adequately assess solar project proposals to protect birds and other wildlife

Protecting funding for least-conflict solar siting

- In 2021, the legislature funded a key program at WSU's Energy Program that will help identify and avoid conflict in the siting of solar energy in the Columbia Plateau
- Although some stakeholder outreach has begun, critical funding for this program is not available until July of 2022
- The legislature must protect this important funding in the supplemental budget process