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January 18, 2021

The Maryland House of Delegates
Committee on Environment and Transportation

HB0094 Water Quality Revolving Loan Fund Aggregation

Position: Support

This letter is to express our strong support for HB0094 and to underscore just how important this legislation is for declining bird populations, other wildlife, and water quality. Audubon Maryland-DC is one of 22 state programs of the National Audubon Society with approximately 19,000 members in Maryland.

This bill enables local governments and qualifying entities to exercise local flexibility in using the Clean Water State Revolving Fund guarantee facility when issuing bonds that will be backed by the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) credit enhancement. Currently, the SRF guarantee facility is narrowly implemented in our state to provide backing solely for wastewater treatment plant upgrades. The list of eligible projects under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) guidelines for the fund extends far beyond wastewater treatment plants.

This legislation would incentivize innovative solutions to environmental challenges and increase flexibility for local governments and rural communities in issuing these bonds. HB0094 would allow for the flow of private capital from institutional markets to make critical investments in forest conservation in Maryland, helping to achieve state-wide emission reduction goals while enhancing the state's clean water without costing taxpayers a dime. If passed eligible projects could focus on reducing nonpoint source pollution like stormwater runoff, implementing plans that protect and grow forests, and improving bay and river health.

For birds, it could be a game changer. Compared with bird populations from 1970, scientists now estimate that the United States and Canada, which are home to 760 bird species, have lost around three billion birds due to loss of habitat, window strikes, outdoor cats, and other factors. This bill could dramatically improve forest cover in The Free State and could be done largely through giving local governments and landowners more choices.

Already, the Family Forest Carbon pilot program, poised to bring millions of dollars to rural families, could allow small family landowners to access carbon markets and provide them with financial incentives to implement tree planting practices that sequester carbon and protect clean water. Maryland alone has nearly 150,000 private and family forest owners with 1.2 million acres of forest. Not as heavily managed for pine monocultures, these private woodlands are some

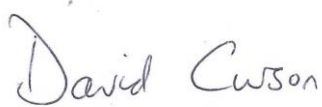
of the most biologically diverse in the state. With the passage of HB0094, Maryland's SRF program could guarantee a bond or other financial agreement for an entity such as the Family Forest Carbon Program.

For these reasons, Audubon Maryland-DC fully supports to HB0094 in order to broaden the application of the SRF and to allow for new sources of private capital to invest in Maryland's clean water, forests, and ultimately birdlife.

Providing flexibility to local governments and infusing cash into rural communities makes sense. Please give HB0094 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

David Curson, PhD

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Curson". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Director of Bird Conservation
Audubon Maryland-DC