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Feb 14, 2025

To: Chair Feldman and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

From: Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 898 Nutrient Management – Tidal Buffer – Vegetative Buffers and Restriction on Fertilizer Application

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 898. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. SB 898 will enable Maryland to slow this habitat loss while investing in natural systems, improved water quality and resiliency protections that the Chesapeake Bay and our tidal coastlines provide for the region's birds and people – all while supporting the state's important agriculture economy.

How the buffer zone is treated between Maryland's tidal water and our adjacent farmland is critical to both our food security, and the health of our vibrant coastal ecosystems and important bird habitat. Without an appropriately vegetated buffer, runoff of fertilizers and sediment erodes into our waterways and vulnerable tidal marshes. SB 898 protects water quality and supports farming communities by investing in best practices for this buffer zone. Additionally, the bill creates incentives to increase the amount of bird habitat through tree planting and increasing vegetation in these critical buffer zones between land and water.

Audubon enthusiastically supports this bill because it:

1. Protects and improves water quality
2. Increases the use of natural climate solutions to reduce runoff and increase bird habitat in an extremely important tidal zone for migrating birds, resident waterfowl, and iconic Maryland species such as the saltmarsh sparrow, osprey, herons and the emblematic waterfowl of our estuaries and rivers
3. Increases the protective buffers surrounding farms, protecting them from more volatile storm events and potential saltwater intrusion.

Additionally SB 898 is an important step forward in elevating the role of the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers, marshes, farms & communities which make up this iconic landscape. These special places not only support hundreds of species of birds, but they benefit Maryland's economies by directly supporting industries ranging from fishing & agriculture to tourism.

Protecting Maryland's Chesapeake tidal zones, our salt marshes, and the nearby buffer zones between land and water is a top priority for Audubon in Maryland. The Near Shore Farm and Finance act supports Audubon's efforts to invest in our coastlines and increase the resiliency of Maryland's tidal zones.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of Senate Bil 898.

Thank You,

Jim Brown