WE'RE OFF AND RUNNING into the first session of the 131st Maine Legislature, excited to continue our work to help pass bills to protect Maine's wildlife and habitat. Our priorities this session are a mix of bills and issue areas that have carried from previous years as well as some new bills that we’re eager to forward.

But before we outline our priorities this session we wanted to share some updates about our team members with you. Maine Audubon's Advocacy Department has grown! Let us reintroduce ourselves so you are familiar with the faces fighting in Augusta and beyond on behalf of climate action, wildlife and habitat protection, and environmental justice.

Our Advocacy Department is backed by the expertise of Maine Audubon’s staff biologists and ecologists and you—our members and supporters. We depend on the support of people who care about wildlife, habitat, and more to help us elevate these issues in the minds of policymakers.

Nothing happens without your support. Thank you!

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**Eliza Donoghue**
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND STAFF ATTORNEY
Eliza has been coordinating Maine Audubon’s advocacy work since 2017. Her responsibilities in the legislature include bills before the Environment and Natural Resources; Energy, Utilities and Technology; and Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committees. In addition, Eliza is recognized as a statewide leader in offshore wind and renewable energy siting, among other issues.

**Nick Lund**
ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH MANAGER
Nick coordinates communications efforts for the Advocacy Team, drafting action alerts, blog posts, magazine articles (like this one!), and other advocacy-related outreach materials. He also organizes Maine Audubon's federal legislative work, including support for the Endangered Species Act, and runs the BirdSafe Maine project to educate about bird-glass collisions.

**Francesca “Ches” Gundrum**
POLICY ADVOCATE
Ches was hired in 2022 to help bolster Maine Audubon's policy work, with a specific focus on bills that come before the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committees. Ches is new to our Advocacy Department but not new to Maine Audubon—she was a member of our famous Coastal Birds Crew in 2020.
As we’ve outlined several times in *Habitat*, Maine Audubon has been closely involved with the potential development of floating offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine. Our staff is working to ensure that Maine can develop its renewable energy resources while minimizing impacts to environmental resources. One bill this session, referred to simply as “The Offshore Wind Bill,” is a critical step in the process of making Maine’s renewable energy future a reality.

The primary goal of the bill is to set a procurement schedule, which would commit the state to purchasing energy produced by turbines in the Gulf of Maine. This commitment is required for developers to feel confident that they can invest in Maine. The bill requires high standards for labor, equity, and the environment, meaning The Offshore Wind Bill will: accelerate the clean energy transition by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels; create a new industry for Maine using Maine-based technology and talent; and ensure that floating offshore wind development is done responsibly with widely shared benefits.

The legislature will consider two important bills this session related to the management of Maine’s threatened and endangered wildlife species.

The first, LD 57, proposes to add species to be listed under Maine’s Endangered Species Act. At least every eight years, the state’s Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife reviews species under its authority and recommends updates to the endangered and threatened species list. This past fall the department proposed extending protections to eight species: Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Bicknell’s Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Tricolored Bat, Ashton’s Cuckoo Bumble Bee, and Marginated Tiger Beetle. We strongly support the inclusion of these species on the list, as each of their populations are declining in the state.

The second bill targets one of the biggest causes of species decline: habitat loss and habitat degradation. Maine’s Department of Environmental Protection is the state’s primary environmental permitting agency, but potential impacts to endangered and threatened species are not considered for the majority of development applications that come before it. The proposed legislation will help expand the circumstances in which the Department of Environmental Protection consults with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on strategies to avoid and minimize impacts to endangered and threatened species habitat. This statutory change will help safeguard habitat for endangered species, increasing their chances of survival.

As Maine Audubon’s Loon Count enters its 40th year we are continuing our advocacy in Augusta on behalf of this iconic species. Our team is eager to forward a bill that would close a legal loophole in order to help protect loons from lead poisoning.

Loons ingest a striking amount of fishing tackle that is either lost or left behind, or is in fish that have ingested tackle. Some of this tackle contains hazardous and life threatening chemicals – chief among them is lead. When swallowing rocks to aid their digestion, loons will accidentally ingest lead tackle that has mixed into the lakebed, and become poisoned. For decades, lead poisoning has been one of the leading causes of loon mortality in Maine, but we’re working to prevent it. Maine Audubon supported a 2013 bill that prohibited the sale of small-sized lead sinkers and jigs—but the law only applied to unpainted jigs. Painted lead gear is common, but the paint in no way reduces the danger of the lead. This new legislation seeks to include painted lead jigs in the prohibition, which we hope will result in much less lead in our waterways. Non-toxic tackle alternatives have become more widely available over the past ten years. Programs in Maine, such as Fish Lead Free, help anglers easily transition to lead-free tackle.
Other Bills

In addition to our spotlight bills there are dozens more that Maine Audubon will work to support or oppose. Here is a sampling of the bills, bonds, and more that we know we'll be working to help pass.

Several bills related to solar energy siting, including a bill to implement the recommendations of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group; a bill to encourage solar development on contaminated or degraded lands; legislation to set in statute a procurement for grid-scale renewable energy projects; and a bill to create a compensation program for terrestrial renewable energy, based on a project's impacts to large forest blocks, prime agricultural soils, and other natural resources.

Maine Audubon joins many of our partners across the state in recognizing the inherent sovereignty of the tribes in Maine, restoring the Wabanaki Nations' inherent rights to self-govern and restoring their jurisdiction over their lands and waters.

The Maine Trails Bond would provide a welcome boost in funding, up to $30M over four years, for non-motorized, motorized, and diverse-use trails utilized for recreation and/or active transportation across the state.

We look forward to supporting efforts to expand the state's land use planning capacity and ability to support municipalities as they seek to make their communities resilient in the face of climate change, address housing shortages, and locate development away from areas that are essential for wildlife to thrive.

Maine Audubon commented on positive changes to the state Department of Environmental Protection's rules related to activity in coastal sand dunes and on beaches. These rule updates, which will bolster protection for Piping Plover and other shorebird habitat, need approval from the Legislature before they're finalized.

An exciting bill initiated by our friends in the Downeast Audubon chapter would designate Blue Hill Falls, an amazing spot to find wintering eiders and other ducks, as a State Waterfowl Sanctuary.

As always, the passionate support of our members is invaluable. Signing up for our Advocacy Alerts via email is the best way to make sure that you’re notified of opportunities to send messages to your representatives, testify on bills that are important to you, and take other actions in support of Maine's wildlife and habitat.

Visit maineaudubon.org/act to learn more and sign up!