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New Jersey Audubon Celebrates Passage of Delaware River Basin Conservation Act

BERNARDSVILLE, NJ – December 10, 2016 – New Jersey Audubon celebrates the passing of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act (DRBCA), which will provide a coordinated strategy for conservation efforts in the watershed and authorizes a grant and technical assistance program to support on-the-ground work throughout the basin. Congress passed the DRBCA as part of a larger legislative package known as the Water Infrastructure Improvements Act for the Nation (WIIN) Act, previously called the Water Resources Development Act. The WIIN Act passed by a majority of 78 to 21 in the Senate and 360 to 61 in the House of Representatives, and will now go to the President’s desk.

The Delaware River Basin is one of our nation’s most important river systems with over 15 million people depending on it for safe drinking water and as a place for recreation and connecting with nature. The river also has great ecological significance and provides habitat to nearly 180 special concern species of fish and wildlife, including unique species like the red knot and Atlantic sturgeon. Despite these important attributes, the Delaware River has historically received a fraction of the federal support other major watersheds in our country enjoy.

“As home to one of the most internationally important shorebird migration sites and the largest population of horseshoe crabs in North America, the watershed supports some of our most treasured wildlife,” stated Eric Stiles, President and CEO of New Jersey Audubon, “We applaud Congress for passing this bill, which prioritizes the Delaware River and recognizes that a healthy, vibrant watershed is essential to our communities and economy.”

Passage of the DRBCA establishes the non-regulatory Delaware River Restoration Program in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will create a coordinated approach for identifying, prioritizing, and implementing restoration and protection projects throughout the watershed. It will also support locally-driven conservation projects through grants and technical assistance to local governments and nonprofit organizations. This program will bolster the substantial work already taking place in the watershed to combat critical issues like habitat degradation, invasive species, and climate change.

Due to the tremendous value of the basin’s resources, the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed, which is coordinated by New Jersey Audubon in partnership with the National Wildlife Federation, identified passage of the DRBCA as a top priority. As such, New Jersey Audubon and the Coalition have been at the forefront of advocating for the DRBCA in Congress.

“By advocating for legislation such as the DRBCA, we can enhance the reach of our on-the-ground

efforts focused on the Delaware River, including water quality and habitat improvements as part of the Delaware River Watershed Initiative (DRWI) and fostering a conservation ethic through our education efforts,” noted Kelly Mooij, Vice President of Government Relations, “The Coalition will work to ensure the program is funded next year to support this type of work and leverage existing initiatives and investments to better protect and restore the resources of our region for future generations.”

In the new year, New Jersey Audubon and the Coalition will advocate for federal funds to be appropriated for the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program so that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can begin its implementation as quickly as possible. The Coalition will also work to ensure the voice of the non-profit community is included in the development of a basin-wide strategy as part of the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program.

About New Jersey Audubon:

New Jersey Audubon is a privately supported, not-for profit, statewide membership organization. Founded in 1897, and one of the oldest independent Audubon’s, New Jersey Audubon is working to make New Jersey a better place for people and wildlife. New Jersey Audubon fosters environmental awareness and a conservation ethic among New Jersey’s citizens; protects New Jersey’s birds, mammals, other animals, and plants, especially endangered and threatened species; and promotes preservation of New Jersey’s valuable natural habitats. For more information, visit www.njaudubon.org