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## **Statewide Conservation Effort Benefiting Birds, People, and Michigan Communities Kicks Off in Detroit**

### *Important Bird Areas (IBAs) critical for birds and people*

**Trenton, MI** –VIPs, conservation leaders and community representatives gathered in Detroit today to kick-off a campaign to recognize and protect Michigan’s Important Bird Areas (IBAs), sites critical to the conservation of Michigan’s birds and wildlife. Nearly 100 IBAs across the state are part of a national and international effort to safeguard habitat essential for bird survival and for thriving human communities.

The Detroit River is a cornerstone of the Michigan IBA effort, providing food and cover for at least 29 species of waterfowl, 23 raptors, and 31 shorebirds. This includes up to 7% of all Canvasbacks in the world, which migrate from nesting areas as far away as Arctic Canada to spend nearly six months on the river during their non-breeding season. Substantial pollution control and restoration efforts by governments, industries, municipalities, and NGOs have drastically improved the environmental quality of the river, also providing scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and clean water to Detroit area residents.

“These sites are vital to the birds, but they give us a whole lot more” said Caleb Putnam, Michigan Important Bird Areas coordinator for National Audubon Society. “The Detroit River IBA and nearly 100 other sites across Michigan involve people in protecting the health, beauty and economic vitality of their own communities. As people help birds, they help themselves.”

“We have seen IBAs bring economic benefits to their communities,” said Jonathan Lutz, Executive Director of Michigan Audubon. “What we’re doing here is bringing beauty, health, and cash to the state of Michigan,” continued Lutz. “IBAs aren’t just important to birds, they are a vital part of the Michigan economy, attracting tourism dollars and providing jobs through restoration, enhancement, and recreation.”

Bruce Szczechowski, environmental science teacher at Southgate’s Anderson High School, recognized the Detroit River’s value to education and co-founded the “Stream Team”, a program engaging students in environmental monitoring on the river. “Helping students to connect with their environment and community is a vital component of the education process, and Stream Team has helped hundreds of kids understand the connection between a healthy ecosystem and their quality of life,” said Szczechowski.

Identified through a comprehensive analysis, the Important Bird Areas of Michigan were selected thanks to the input of a voluntary panel of bird experts, referred to as the Michigan IBA Technical Committee. The state’s IBA network encompasses over 3.6 million acres of habitat--including a million acres of water--all critical for maintaining or increasing populations of wild birds. “The designations are an important step in building public commitment to protecting these essential areas and understanding their

benefits to our state,” adds Putnam. “Today we celebrate completion of the network of sites most critical to Michigan’s birds.”

A sampling of other IBA sites in Michigan includes:

**Hillsdale County Henslow's Sparrow private lands:** An area of south central Hillsdale County, entirely privately-owned, supports one of Michigan’s highest nesting densities of the state-threatened Henslow’s Sparrow, an indicator of high quality grasslands. This area boasts a large amount of scenic open land which supports numerous family farms and agricultural operations.

**Isle Royale National Park (Keweenaw County):** This Important Bird Area features over 130,000 acres of northern forests and wetlands and hosts one of the state’s largest populations of nesting Common Loons and Merlins. It is an iconic symbol of Michigan’s expansive northern wilderness, and has some of the state’s highest numbers of Gray Wolves and Moose, attracting over ten thousand visitors annually despite its remote location in western Lake Superior. The park is owned and managed by the U.S. National Park Service.

**Maple River State Game Area (Clinton, Gratiot, and Ionia Counties):** A diverse wetland complex and river corridor supporting one of Michigan’s highest nesting densities of the Prothonotary Warbler, a striking golden-yellow songbird on Audubon’s WatchList of declining species. During spring and fall migration the Rusty Blackbird, also a species in decline, uses the extensive swampland and marsh by the thousands. The property is sustainably used by birders, recreationists, and hunters each year, and is owned and managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

**Raco Plains and Wilwin Wetland (Chippewa County):** An extensive ecoregion stretching from Trout Lake to Raco composed of sandy soils of jack pine and grassland. Several bird species of conservation importance are present including the rare Spruce Grouse and the Sharp-tailed Grouse. The endangered Kirtland’s Warbler nests on portions of the Hiawatha National Forest within this Important Bird Area.

**Saginaw Bay (Arenac, Bay, Huron, and Tuscola Counties):** An Important Bird Area of global significance, this bay of Lake Huron supports tens of thousands of migrating waterfowl each spring and fall, including Tundra Swans, Redheads, Scaup, and other species. It also hosts important nesting colonies for terns, gulls, and night-herons, as well as a large raptor migration of over 10,000 hawks, falcons, eagles, and vultures each spring. Saginaw Bay also comprises a highly productive system of wetlands along its roughly 100 miles of coast which provide vital ecological services and recreational opportunities for thousands of residents.

**Western Lake Erie Basin (Monroe County):** Near shore portions of Lake Erie’s western basin play host to tens of thousands of waterfowl during fall migration and winter including tens of thousands of Tundra Swans. This IBA connects to the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair to form a continuous corridor of habitat stretching from Ohio to Algonac. The unique habitats of western Lake Erie are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and others as part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, offering exceptional fishing, hunting, birding, and recreational opportunities. Lake Erie has experienced a profound recovery in water quality since the 1960s to the benefit of both bird and human inhabitants.

“This newly recognized network of Important Bird Areas highlights the outstanding bird diversity found in Michigan, and will serve as a blueprint for conservation in our great state,” added Putnam. “Audubon and our conservation partners look forward to working with citizens and groups throughout Michigan to conserve and protect these sites.”

For more information about Michigan's IBAs visit <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/michigan/press.html>

The Michigan IBA Program, supported at the state level through a partnership between the Detroit Audubon Society, Kalamazoo Nature Center, Michigan Audubon, and the National Audubon Society, is part of a global effort to identify and conserve the world's most important areas for birds, and is coordinated worldwide by BirdLife International. Since 1985, over 7,500 sites in nearly 170 countries have been identified as Important Bird Areas. National Audubon Society is the BirdLife International partner for the United States.

*Now in its second century, Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation.*