Meeting summary for Advocacy Coordination & Cooperation (02/24/2025)

Quick recap

The meeting focused on the potential for coordination and cooperation among Audubon Mid-Atlantic and PA Audubon Council, and quarterly PA Audubon Council meetings with Andy Loza from We Conserve PA.
The team also discussed the recent changes in the Harrisburg legislature, the challenges of the current legislative session, and the potential involvement of Audubon Mid-Atlantic in their consortium. The conversation ended with discussions on the need for regular meetings, the importance of collaboration and efficiency in their work, and the potential for increased lobbying efforts.

Next steps

• Lee to schedule quarterly calls with Andy and share dates with Jim and Tess ahead of time.
• Jim and Tess to review the PA Audubon Council's chapter survey and provide feedback before mid-March.
• Tess to email the list of upcoming policy-focused events at Discovery Center and JJC to Lee, Sue, and Heidi.
• PA Audubon Council Board to discuss potential dates for a collaborative meeting with Jim and Tess to review chapter priorities.
• Lee to share the report of this call's productivity and next steps with the PA Audubon Council Board at their next meeting.
• Lee to get back to Jim and Tess early next week with Andy's dates and other requested information.
• Jim and Tess to consider attending the PA Audubon Council's call with chapters to discuss conservation priorities in late March.
• PA Audubon Council and Audubon Mid-Atlantic teams to explore opportunities for joint advocacy efforts, particularly on shared priorities like community solar.
• Jim and Tess to look into potential site visits with legislators and Audubon chapters, to discuss forestry and invasive species issues.
• Heidi to consider including Audubon Mid-Atlantic in future Bird Town "clutch meetings" to share state-level advocacy information.

Summary

Coordination and Cooperation Among Groups
The meeting involved discussions about the potential for coordination or cooperation among different groups. PA Audubon Council provided an update on their status, mentioning the loss of a key position at We Conserve PA due to funding changes, and the subsequent shift to Andy Loza at We Conserve PA. They also discussed their quarterly meetings and the slow progress in Harrisburg. PA AUDUBON COUNCIL mentioned that they follow a model similar to the New York State Council and are working on surveys to identify high priority conservation issues. The meeting also touched on the differences between their group and others, such as the New York State Council and National Audubon. The possibility of working with Ezra Thrush, lobbyist, in a new position was also discussed.

Informal Feedback and Team Updates
In the meeting, PA Audubon Council discussed the benefits of informal feedback and the direction they are heading in. Tess expressed her desire to provide regular updates about happenings in Harrisburg and potential actions for the team. She proposed monthly meetings to achieve this, which Jim agreed to try out. Tess also mentioned the possibility of special meetings if urgent actions are needed. Jim reiterated the importance of these updates and the potential for them to grow.

Harrisburg Team Changes and Collaboration
Jim discussed the recent changes in the Harrisburg team, particularly the departure of Ezra from Penn Future and his new role with the Ridge Policy Group. He mentioned that Audubon Mid-Atlantic is planning for 2026, considering hiring more staff or consultants in Harrisburg, but the budget for this is uncertain. PA Audubon Council shared past experiences with having staff in Harrisburg, and suggested that multiple environmental groups could collaborate to hire a lobbyist. Jim agreed to consider this idea.

Audubon MID-Atlantic, Federal Money, and Elections
The team discussed the potential involvement of AMA in their consortium, with Jim planning to talk to Ezra about the possibilities. They also discussed the challenges of the current legislative session, the impact of withheld federal money on state budgets, and the potential implications of Governor Shapiro’s reelection campaign and his possible presidential run. The team also mentioned the importance of monitoring the situation with the Solar for All program, and the ongoing lawsuit about withheld federal money.

Team Coordination and Climate Action
In the meeting, PA Audubon Council and Jim discussed the coordination and cooperation between their respective teams. They agreed to continue with their monthly calls and quarterly calls with Andy. Jim suggested having more frequent touchpoints to share each other's events and get them on each other's radar. PA Audubon Council confirmed that the Drummer, a monthly newsletter, would be coming out on the second Tuesday of each month. They also discussed the possibility of consolidating the PA Audubon Chapter survey results by the end of March and the potential for 100 Bird Towns by midsummer. Heidi added that the Bird Towns

goal of 100 might be achieved by the end of the year. They also acknowledged the importance of local action in addressing climate issues.

Environmental Initiatives and Partnerships Discussed
Discussion of environmental initiatives and partnerships. Heidi mentioned her work with Penn Environment and her upcoming call with Simran Kinker from Penn Environment about boreal forest conservation in Canada. PA Audubon Council shared their collaboration with We Conserve PA and the potential for more municipalities to adopt Bird Town. They also discussed the challenges of passing ordinances and the potential for bipartisan support in the State legislature. PA Audubon Council mentioned that Connie Sanchez, a former member of the Audubon Action Fund Board, has changed her position with Audubon and may have a more advocacy role. The team also discussed the possibility of hiring a lobbyist, but noted that as a 501(c)(3) organization, they might not be allowed to do so.

Lobbying, Community Solar, and Conservation
The team discussed the possibility of increased lobbying efforts, with a focus on environmental issues. They considered the potential for a more frequent call schedule with Andy, to better coordinate outreach and advocacy efforts. The team also discussed the importance of community solar initiatives and the potential for increased funding for conservation efforts. They agreed to review survey responses from chapters and plan a quarterly report early in April. The team also discussed the need for careful consideration of lobbying rules and the potential for increased involvement in forest conservation efforts.

Quarterly Meetings and Senator Support
In the meeting, PA Audubon Council discussed the possibility of scheduling quarterly meetings with Jim and Tess, with the dates to be confirmed by Andy. PA Audubon Council also mentioned the possibility of involving chapter leaders and committee members in contacting Senators for support on specific issues. Jim and Tess agreed to the idea of attending these meetings, provided with enough notice. PA Audubon Council also mentioned the possibility of Andy Loza getting involved in certain issues, especially those related to budget and policy. Heidi suggested that PA Audubon Council could share the meeting dates with Jim and Tess ahead of time to help them plan their schedules.

Legislative Priorities and Environmental Advocacy
In the meeting, Jim discussed the legislative priorities for the state, focusing on the funding for DCNR and the need for professional licensed foresters. He also mentioned the potential for site visits with legislators to discuss invasive species and forestry work. Jim also highlighted the reintroduction of the riparian buffer bill and the need for advocacy on climate issues. Heidi and PA discussed the role of Bird Towns and chapters in promoting environmental awareness, emphasizing the importance of staying apolitical. They also discussed the potential for local initiatives and the need for coordination between chapters and the state level. Tess mentioned the upcoming events at two Audubon centers, including policy-focused events.

Aligning Priorities and Survey Collaboration

The team discussed the need for regular meetings with the PA Audubon Council and their team, with a focus on monthly meetings. They agreed to set up a meeting between the board and Tess and Jim, with the aim of aligning priorities and discussing potential activities. The team also discussed the importance of collaboration and efficiency in their work, with the suggestion to work together on a survey. The next steps include sharing the report of the current meeting with the Council Board and looking at the survey policy.