

# How To Be An Effective Advocate In Less Than 5 Minutes

You can help ensure lawmakers take appropriate action on legislation by taking three simple actions:

## 1 Contact Your Lawmakers

and urge them to support or defeat a specific bill;

## 2 Monitor & Utilize the Media

to keep conservation issues alive in your local newspapers, magazines, and on TV and radio stations; and

## 3 Get Others Involved!

Now that you've made the decision to more actively advocate for the protection of birds, other wildlife and our shared environment, we can take the next steps together to implement your efforts. Audubon's Public Policy Division is here to keep you up-to-date on conservation measures pending in the U.S. Congress, government agencies and your state legislatures. We'll let you know when bills are heading for a vote or are in danger of being ignored. We'll work with you to educate your community on key environmental issues through local newspapers, radio stations and other media outlets.



You – as a constituent – are your lawmakers’ boss. They want to hear from you. Use that influence; you don’t have to be an expert or a professional lobbyist.

Bring your passion for wildlife — then go through the easy-to-follow guidelines presented here. Select those activities that work best for you. Better yet, try them all at least once!

For more information,  
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ACTION  
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audubon

You can become a truly effective Audubon advocate in less than five minutes!

## 1. CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

### ✓ Place a Phone Call

When time is short, the best way to communicate with your legislator is by telephone. Your call will take just a minute and could change the way your lawmaker will vote on an issue. You will probably speak with an aide rather than the lawmaker, but your call is still important. Here are several tips to help maximize the effectiveness of your telephone call:

- A) Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your House Member or Senator. The operator will connect you. Identify yourself as a constituent: Lawmakers are most concerned and interested in the thoughts and opinions of their constituents – people who live and vote in their state or district.
- B) Be brief and clear: Always limit your call to one subject. Be specific. State why you are calling and the action you would like the lawmaker to take. Give a bill number if possible.
- C) Be courteous and ask for a response: Regardless of your lawmaker’s position on an issue, always be respectful. If the lawmaker does not support your bill or otherwise agree with you, let her/him know you’re disappointed. If the office does not know where the lawmaker stands on a specific bill or issue, be sure to ask for a written response once they have had a chance to review the legislation or ask for a time when you should phone again to find out the lawmaker’s decision on the bill or issue.

### ✓ Write a Letter

Letters and hand-crafted emails have an important impact on lawmakers. They often calculate that each letter received from one constituent represents a similar view of at least 100 others. When time is short, send your letter by email or fax. Postal letters to Members of Congress are heavily scanned and often take several weeks to reach an actual congressional office in Washington, DC.

Personally written letters to lawmakers allow you to present your position without interruption. To maximize your letter’s impact, it should be short, to the point and on only one topic. Be sure to include how the issue affects you and/or your community. If you are responding to an Audubon alert that provides a sample letter, be sure to put the message in your own words and personalize it.

Here are a few more tips to refer to when drafting your letters:

- A) Address Your Lawmakers Appropriately: Use “The Honorable,” followed by her/his name, and begin the letter “Dear Senator” or “Dear Representative.”

The Honorable _____	The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate	U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510	Washington, DC 20515
- B) Be Brief, Specific and Courteous: Keep your letter to no more than one page and one subject. State the purpose in the opening paragraph, particularly the action you would like to see taken. If your letter pertains to a specific bill, identify it accordingly. Always be courteous – even if you respectfully disagree with your lawmaker’s position.

- C) Ask for a Reply: Always close your letter by asking for a written response stating the lawmaker's position on the issue.
- D) Fax and Email: There are a few additional guidelines to follow when faxing or emailing. Always include your address so your lawmaker knows you are a constituent. If faxing, be sure to include the fax number on your letter. You can find your lawmaker's web site at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). Look for the "Contact Me" or "Write Me" link — most lawmakers use an email form for constituent communications.
- E) Join Audubon's E-Activist Community at: [www.audubonaction.org/audubon](http://www.audubonaction.org/audubon).

## ✓ Personal Visits

By far the most effective way to articulate your views to your elected officials and positively affect the outcome of legislation is through face-to-face meetings. Most legislators and their staff welcome the opportunity to meet with their constituents. Even though it will take longer than five minutes to schedule, sit down and speak with your lawmaker, the payoff for birds and wildlife is very high. It's also much easier than you might think. Here are some suggestions for meeting with your lawmakers:

- A) Attend a Lawmaker's Town Meeting: Your local newspaper should list where and when your lawmaker is hosting a town meeting. Be prepared to ask a simple, concise question. Ask family members and friends to join you. These meetings are generally quite informal and small, so they are great places to get to know your lawmaker personally and ask your question in a public forum. To keep up-to-date with when your lawmaker will be in your district/state and where s/he will make appearances, call your lawmaker's office and ask to be placed on the town meeting information or invitation list.
- B) Schedule an Appointment with the Lawmaker's Office: Scheduling a formal face-to-face meeting is the most effective way to communicate with your lawmaker. Most meetings last 10 to 30 minutes.

To schedule an appointment, call your lawmaker's office, ask for the "scheduler" and set up a meeting.

Whether the meeting is to be at the legislator's local office or in Washington, DC, always identify yourself as a constituent. Oftentimes, the legislator cannot meet you but her/his staff can; meetings with staff are just as important. Congressional staffers are very busy. If you leave a voice mail for the scheduler and s/he does not return your call, try again in about two days. Polite persistence pays off.

When meeting with a lawmaker or staffer, always come prepared with a specific request for action — an "ask" — for the lawmaker to take. After clearly stating your position, ask for the lawmaker's position on the issue or legislation. Politely press for a commitment. If the legislator is not able to state her/his position at the time of the meeting, ask when you should follow up (usually within a week of the visit) and how (by phone or email) to inquire about any action taken. Be sure to discuss how the legislation will directly affect you. Personal stories carry weight. If possible, demonstrate widespread support by mentioning others in the community — organizations, officials, etc. — who agree with your position.

Always be polite, positive, and professional. Start off your meeting by thanking the lawmaker or staffer for meeting with you and for any past helpful support. Close the meeting with a "thank you" as well, regardless of whether or not the lawmaker will do what you want her/him to do. Do not refer to any lawmakers by their last names only.

Always bring written material — an information packet — to give to the lawmaker or staffer. If you would like help with putting together an information packet, contact Audubon's policy team in Washington, DC.

Follow up your visit with a personal letter thanking the lawmaker or staffer for her/his time. This is another opportunity to make your point. If the Congressional office made a commitment, remind them of this in your letter.

Write up the results of your meeting and share it with the Audubon policy team in Washington. Use this first meeting to build a solid working relationship with your elected officials and their staff.

## 2. MONITOR & UTILIZE THE MEDIA

### Keep Conservation Issues Alive in Your Local Newspapers, Magazines, and on TV and Radio Stations.

The media plays a powerful role in conservation efforts. It helps shape public opinion on policies like protecting endangered species and drilling in the Arctic. You can help maximize the potential of this resource by calling in to local talk shows and writing letters to the editor. Not only will you raise an important issue in your community, you'll also grab the attention of elected officials, who pay close attention to opinions voiced in newspapers, radio and TV in their district or state. Here are some tips to monitor and utilize local media:

**Stay Informed:** Sign up for Audubon's Policy Advisory and Alerts to keep up to date with all the important policy issues that Audubon works on, [www.audubonaction.org/audubon](http://www.audubonaction.org/audubon).

**Letters to the Editor:** Letters to the editor provide you with an opportunity to comment on articles, editorials and advertisements appearing in local newspapers.

- A) **Know the Rules:** Check the paper's guidelines for writing letters; these are usually clearly stated on the editorial page of your newspaper. Be sure to include your name, address and telephone number (papers do not print anonymous letters and often call to verify authorship).
- B) **Be Specific, and the Shorter, the Better:** Many papers won't publish letters longer than 200 words. Most prefer 150. Be sure to state the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph.
- C) **Timeliness Is Everything:** Respond as soon as possible to printed stories or editorials. Write your letters on debates, issues or legislation happening right now.

## 3. GET OTHERS INVOLVED

Make sure your family and friends are aware of conservation legislation and encourage them to get involved. The more people involved in our efforts, the better our chances of creating a future with which we can all live. Email alerts to friends and co-workers quickly when conservation legislation is up for a vote or in danger of being ignored. Let them know the vote's outcome, and how your specific lawmaker voted on the measure. Invite friends and family over for pizza and a letter-writing party. Pick an issue, pick a theme, have fun, give door prizes, but get those opinions in to lawmakers!

We can help you with your "house party" or other event – contact us at [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org) or 800-659-2622.



## So there you have it

— tips for becoming an effective Audubon advocate in less than 5 minutes. Simple, time-tested methods of how you – as a constituent – can make a tremendous impact on the legislative process.

For more information, please contact the

National Audubon Society

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[www.audubonaction.org/audubon](http://www.audubonaction.org/audubon)