



February 25, 2026

**Written Testimony in Support of HB26-1081
House Energy and Environment Committee**

Chair Valdez and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nicole Bopp and I serve as Executive Director of Denver Audubon. Founded in 1969, Denver Audubon is an independent nonprofit organization serving communities across Jefferson, Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, Elbert, and Douglas counties. Our mission is to inspire actions that protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through education, conservation, and research. Our vision is to make Denver the most bird friendly city in the United States.

I am writing to respectfully ask you to vote in support of HB26-1081.

Denver Audubon's strategic framework recognizes that birds are essential to our ecosystems, and conserving them protects the balance of nature and the health of our communities. When birds thrive, our communities thrive. As Colorado works to modernize its energy system and meet growing demand, we must do so in ways that are science based, efficient, and mindful of wildlife and habitat impacts.

Transmission infrastructure plays a critical role in delivering affordable and reliable electricity, especially as renewable energy resources expand across our state. At the same time, new transmission lines can fragment habitat, increase bird collision risk, alter migration pathways, and disrupt sensitive ecosystems. Poorly sited or unnecessary infrastructure can create long lasting impacts on birds and other wildlife.

HB26-1081 takes a thoughtful and forward looking approach by requiring regulated utilities to evaluate advanced transmission technologies in their long-term planning. By optimizing existing transmission corridors through grid enhancing technologies, Colorado can increase capacity, improve reliability and resilience, and accelerate renewable energy integration while potentially reducing the need for new transmission construction.

From a conservation perspective, this matters. Maximizing the use of existing infrastructure can help limit habitat loss and fragmentation, reduce wildlife conflicts, and minimize additional disturbance to open spaces and rural landscapes. From a community perspective, it can help control costs, improve system performance, and support a more resilient grid in the face of extreme weather and growing demand.

Denver Audubon believes that protecting birds and advancing smart climate and energy solutions are not competing goals. They are interconnected. A modern, efficient grid that reduces unnecessary new infrastructure supports both ecological health and human well-being.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to vote yes on HB26-1081 and advance this bill to the full House for debate. Thank you for your leadership and service to Colorado.

Nicole Bopp
Executive Director
Denver Audubon
11280 Waterton Road
Littleton, CO 80125
denveraudubon.org

Honorable Committee Members,

I wish to express my strong support for HB26-1081, “Concerning measures to optimize Colorado's electric transmission system.” As I will be traveling outside of Colorado on February 26, I will not be able to attend your hearing in person and must instead submit these written comments.

I am a retired engineer and public policy analyst and a registered voter in Fort Collins (zip code 80526). I spent the last 30 years of my career working for and with governmental departments and commissions across the United States (and abroad) that regulate electric utilities. I advised public utility commissions in dozens of states (including Colorado) on how to ensure that electric utilities can provide reliable and affordable electricity to consumers while reducing the environmental impacts of their operations. As a Senior Associate at the nonprofit [Regulatory Assistance Project](#) from 2011-2022, I authored dozens of research papers relevant to the topic of electric transmission systems, including:

- Shenot, J., Prause, E., & Shipley, J. (2022). [*Using Benefit-Cost Analysis to Improve Distribution System Investment Decisions*](#). Montpelier, VT: The Regulatory Assistance Project.
- Shenot, J. (lead editor). (2019). [*Integrated Distribution Planning for Electric Utilities: Guidance for Public Utility Commissions*](#). Mid-Atlantic Distributed Resources Initiative.
- IRENA. (2018). [*Insights on Planning for Power System Regulators*](#). Abu Dhabi: International Renewable Energy Agency.
- SEE Action Driving Ratepayer-Funded Efficiency through Regulatory Policies Working Group. (2011). [*Using Integrated Resource Planning to Encourage Investment in Cost-Effective Energy Efficiency Measures*](#).

Throughout my work and the publications cited above, I consistently emphasized the benefits to consumers of smart long-term electricity system planning practices. Electric utilities routinely develop and update long-term plans to meet their customers’ needs for decades in advance. They make hugely expensive investments in transmission lines, power plants, and other infrastructure that may last for decades. And they recover the costs of those investments through the rates customers pay on their electric bills for decades. The cost to consumers of investing in the wrong things can be extraordinary and can last for decades. This is why smart planning practices are so important. If we take every reasonable step during the planning process to make sound investment decisions, we will not only keep the lights on but do so at the lowest long-term cost possible while meeting all other state policy goals.

Most people do not realize that investor-owned, for-profit electric utilities like Xcel and Black Hills typically are authorized by regulators to earn a rate of return for their shareholders (i.e., profits) **only on capital** investments made on **infrastructure**. They do not earn profits on a myriad of non-infrastructure investments or operational expenditures

that might reduce their operational costs, such as reducing energy losses and using transmission lines more efficiently. This “utility business model” creates a disincentive for those utilities to invest in the kinds of grid-enhancing technologies that HB26-1081 would encourage. To put it bluntly, investor-owned utilities can earn greater returns for their shareholders by building big new transmission lines than by using their existing lines more efficiently or building smaller but more efficient new lines.¹ And this, fundamentally, is the reason I support HB26-1081. This legislation would direct the public utilities commission to require the state’s electric utilities to consider grid-enhancing technologies as part of their long-term planning processes.

Consumers would likely benefit, and benefit hugely, from enactment of HB26-1081 and fair consideration of grid-enhancing technologies. This bill would ensure that our utilities look for opportunities to reduce consumer costs by deploying such technologies in lieu of more costly investments in new and/or less efficient transmission lines. One such technology is the installation of sensors on existing transmission lines that measure key variables in real time and allow for “dynamic line ratings.” What this means is that the grid operator can know in real time, from hour to hour, how much current that line is able to carry. Without such sensors, the grid operator must rely on a conservative estimate of how much current the line can carry under worst case conditions, which will avoid overloading the line but will frequently underestimate its actual capacity to carry current in most hours of the year. Dynamic line ratings can thus improve the reliability of the transmission system by replacing estimates with real-time data. In addition, and probably most importantly, if the grid operator always relies on conservative estimates of how much current existing transmission lines can carry, the utility may feel the need to invest in new transmission lines that are not yet needed or are oversized. And those kinds of mistakes can be hugely expensive for utility customers.

An [often-cited example](#) of how grid-enhancing technologies save money occurred in Pennsylvania. Instead of reconstructing two high voltage transmission lines to increase their capacity, the electric utility PPL installed sensors and dynamic line rating capabilities that solved a perceived transmission capacity problem at much lower cost. PPL and its customers saved about \$50 million in investment costs and are expected to save about \$20 million annually in operational costs.

I also want to emphasize that dynamic line ratings and other grid-enhancing technologies not detailed in my testimony can also reduce the environmental impacts of the electric grid. Transmission lines are the backbone of an electric power system that provides huge

¹ Even though electric cooperatives and municipal electric utilities are not similarly driven by a profit motive, these smaller utilities may have less exposure to new technologies and some (certainly not all!) may still harbor a bias in favor of those technologies that are most familiar or “industry standards” – often until long after new technologies have proven to be superior.

societal benefits, but they come at an environmental cost in terms of land use, habitat disturbances, resources used to build them, and wildlife impacts. To minimize those impacts, we need to get as much capacity and value as possible out of every transmission investment our utilities make. Building or rebuilding lines that we don't need or that are oversized will waste resources and damage habitats that are already threatened by other human impacts.

For all these reasons, I urge the Committee and the entire legislature to vote in favor of HB26-1081.

Respectfully,
John Shenot
Fort Collins



BOULDER COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 2081 ♦ Boulder, Colorado 80306
www.boulderaudubon.org ♦ crossbill@boulderaudubon.org

Feb 25, 2026

Dear Chair Valdez and Members of the House Energy and Environment Committee:

The Conservation Committee of Boulder County Audubon Society (BCAS) is pleased to submit this letter supporting HB26-1081 concerning measures to optimize Colorado's electric transmission system. BCAS represents over 1,600 members in Boulder, Broomfield, and portions of Broomfield and Weld Counties. We are a voice for birds and wildlife conservation through habitat protection, advocacy, and nature education.

BCAS urges you to support HB26-1081 which encourages use of Advanced Transmission Technologies to increase the load carrying capacity of existing transmission lines, thereby reducing the need to build new transmission lines and facilitating the integration of cleaner energy sources into the grid. Not only will consumers benefit from reduced costs, access to cleaner energy sources, and increased reliability, but birds will also benefit through the anticipated reduction in construction of new transmission lines that disrupt, fragment, and destroy habitat for birds and other wildlife. These technologies can also enhance public safety and help protect our communities and wildlife by minimizing wildfire risk.

Please vote yes for HB26-1081 to take cost-effective measures to optimize Colorado's electric transmission system.

Regards,

Boulder County Audubon Society Conservation Committee