



VOTERS' GUIDE TO NAME CHANGE ELECTION

JANUARY 2025

HOW TO VOTE: A mass email will be sent out to all current Black Hills Audubon members on March 15th, 2025 for whom we have email addresses. In this email there will be a link to the electronic voting system, Election Buddy, which is running this election. There will also be a unique "key" in the email which, when entered into Election Buddy, will bring up the ballot for voting. This "key" can only be used once. Make sure you have completed the two questions according to your preferences before submitting them as all votes are final. You will receive a completion notice when the vote has been successful.

THE TWO BALLOT QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you want to change the name "Black Hills Audubon Society" to one of the choices listed in question 2?
- 2) If a new name is preferred, please rank your favorites among these choices (3 or 4 options will be listed):

ELIGIBILITY: All current members as of April 15, 2025 will be eligible to vote. If we don't have an email listed for you or you become a member after March 15th, you may vote by contacting the BHAS public liaison through our email (4info@blackhills-audubon.org) or phone line (360-352-7299). You will then be supplied with the web address and a "key" to use for voting.

If there is more than one adult person in your household who wishes to vote and you only receive one “key” in the mass email, please contact the liaison through the email or phone listed above for additional instructions. **THIS ELECTION ALLOWS ONE VOTE PER PERSON.**

If you do not have an email address, you may still vote. Please contact the BHAS public liaison through the email or phone listed above. Leave a message that you wish to vote. You will be contacted with the website address of Election Buddy as well as receive the unique “key” which, when entered into Election Buddy, will provide a ballot for your vote. You can then use a public library computer or a friend/family’s computer to complete your ballot.

EXPLANATION OF RANKED CHOICE BALLOT: Ranked Choice Voting, a.k.a. Instant Runoff Election, is good for selecting a broadly acceptable candidate from more than two choices. Each voter rates the choices in their order of preference. After ballots are counted, if no choice exceeds 50%, the alternative with the fewest votes is eliminated and its votes are distributed to the voters’ next choice. This repeats until a candidate wins.

More info on this type of election can be found online. Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instant-runoff_voting, is a good place to start.

PROS AND CONS OF REMOVING ‘AUDUBON’ FROM OUR NAME: John James Audubon's ornithological work inspired the creation of the Audubon Society fifty years after his death in 1905. Scholarship has made more public the facts that he was a plagiarist, slave-holder, racist, anti-Semite, and desecrator of indigenous graves. The Audubon chapter on Vashon Island recently articulated this in its newsletter:

“A tenuous balance between fact and fiction runs through Audubon’s life and work,” writes author Ella Foshay. Some examples: In England, Audubon exhibited his painting of a huge North American eagle—but no such bird exists. He falsely claimed that he discovered Lincoln’s Sparrow, although others had done so earlier. Many of the backgrounds of his paintings were done by an assistant, and Audubon erased the helper’s name. [1] Most disturbing, Audubon enslaved people. In the 1810s, he enslaved nine people, then sold them when he needed cash. Later he took two enslaved men down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where he left them after selling them. He acquired several more enslaved people during the 1820s. [2] We think this shameful legacy is reason enough to drop the Audubon name. If we fail to acknowledge the disgraces of the past and rectify them when we can, our organization will lose its own respect and undermine our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Many Audubon chapters throughout the country have decided recently to change their names, so as not to be connected to Audubon's worst self. We, the members of Black Hills Audubon Society, need to decide what our name should be.

Reasons NOT to change our name, Black Hills Audubon Society:

The name Audubon is familiar to many people, who know our chapter pursues bird protection and habitat conservation.

Black Hills Audubon Society, with that name, is familiar to people and legislators, with whom we connect to further our mission.

We can acknowledge Audubon's faults and sins, normal in his time, however heinous in ours, yet still respect his ornithological work.

Audubon chapters' new names, diverse in Washington and throughout the country, may confuse the public. The public may no longer associate local chapters with the national organization, the National Audubon Society, of which they are a part.

A name change would necessitate changes to by-laws.

A name change would engender expenses, because we would have to change our website, stationery, and other products.

Reasons to change our name:

With its unsavory connotations, the Audubon name may turn away younger or other potential members at a time when we are trying to attract a more diverse membership.

In 2024, many people have no or only a vague sense that the Audubon Society “has something to do with birds.” A new name may more clearly convey our mission. In addition, there is some confusion about Black Hills. Recently I heard someone ask a member, “Why are you named for mountains in South Dakota?”

Despite a name change, we would still be under the auspices of the National Audubon Society, who decided not to change its name.

A name change is symbolic of our desire to take a stand against past and present wrongs. To change our name is the decent thing to do.

Our chapter, despite its relative small size, has myriad amazing accomplishments in its history. We are rightly proud of what has been done and look forward to continually building a strong, creative, and welcoming organization.

[1] Matthew R. Halley, Audubon’s Bird of Washington: unravelling the fraud that launched the birds of America (Bulletin of the British Ornithologists’ Club, 2020). Halley wrote that Audubon’s diary transcripts were doctored to support his false claim of personally discovering Lincoln’s Sparrow.

[2] Gregory Nobles, John James Audubon: The Nature of the American Woodsman (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2027). Nobles is the author of www.audubon.org/news/the-myth-john-james-audubon in National Audubon, The Myth of John James Audubon.

RESULTS: The results of this election will first be shared with the Board of Directors. Then a mass email will be sent out to our membership to inform them of the results. There will also be an article in the May Echo newsletter with the results, including how the ranked choice votes were distributed.

QUESTIONS? Please submit questions about this election to 4info@blackhills-audubon.org or leave a message at 360-352-7299.