

September 8, 2016

University of West Florida
Department of Biology, Building 58/60
11000 University Parkway
Pensacola, FL 32514

Dear Drs. Whitaker and Janosik:

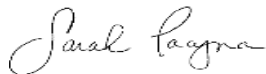
With great enthusiasm, I am pleased to submit this letter of support of your proposal, A non-invasive molecular approach to diet composition of Least Terns. Least Terns are one of Audubon Mississippi's focal species, and our program is very interested in supporting this project.

Audubon Mississippi promotes the safeguarding of coastal birds and their habitats through volunteer engagement, outreach, and strategic partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies, academic institutions, and community organizations. Employing a grassroots approach to conservation, the program works to build constituents and advocates for healthy populations of coastal birds and protection of the habitats and ecosystems on which they depend. Our conservation and research efforts focus on coastal bird species, including Least Terns, and the habitats they depend on during different life stages including breeding, wintering, and migration.

Your proposed work is of great interest to our program as it contributes to the growing body of knowledge pertaining to the ecology of the Least Tern. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill raised awareness of the exacerbating plight facing coastal birds and their habitats. For many coastal birds, the consequences of the oil spill were compounded by the ongoing challenges these species already face: a dearth of data on current populations and composition; threats to habitat such as erosion, human development, sea level rise, increased storm intensity, and pollution; competition of space from over-crowding, invasive species, and marine debris; human-induced disturbances including dogs off-leash, disturbance of nesting grounds, and even poaching of eggs; predation, including human-amplified; and the reduction of prey species. In order to develop holistic strategies to conserve Least Terns and other coastal birds, understanding diet and threats to prey is imperative. Your proposed project will provide critical information that will inform management.

Audubon Mississippi fully endorses this project, and I look forward to seeing the results. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 973-280-6341 or 228-285-0449.

Sincerely,



Sarah Pacyna
Program Director, Audubon Coastal Bird Stewardship Program