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To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chair

From: Matt Smith, Conservation Delivery Specialist, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Wilson, KS.

Date: January 22 , 2024

RE: HB 2541 – Establishing a state conservation fund

Dear Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2541. Playa Lakes Joint Venture is a regional partnership of federal and state wildlife agencies, conservation groups, and private industry dedicated to conserving playas for the benefit of birds and people in the western Great Plains. We are members of the Kansans for Conservation coalition which has led the collaborative drafting process of HB 2541.

Playas are small ephemeral wetlands found throughout the western Great Plains, Playas provide essential wetland habitat for migratory birds and are a primary source of recharge to the Ogallala Aquifer.

Creation of a conservation fund able to match federal or private dollars could result in a more resilient landscape for over 200 bird species and increase groundwater recharge to the aquifer. Communities in western Kansas are threatened by a declining Ogallala Aquifer, which has already affected their water supplies.

Senator Moran recently called for Congress to increase investment in water and agricultural resilience in the next Farm Bill. A strong conservation fund will provide Kansas an opportunity to capture those resources to strengthen our economics while protecting our environment.

As outlined above and by our fellow coalition members, the establishment of state conservation funding benefits all Kansans, allows for the proper stewardship of the resources bestowed upon us, and enables the state to be competitive for match opportunities. Therefore, we ask you to support HB 2541.

Sincerely,

Matt Smith, Playa Lakes Joint Venture

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