



**Proponent Testimony on HB 2541**  
**Abe Lollar, Biologist, Ducks Unlimited**  
**Kansas House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee**  
**January 22, 2024**

Good afternoon Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue. My name is Abe Lollar and I'm a biologist for Ducks Unlimited based in Garden City. Born and raised in Derby, I always had a passion for the outdoors, and decided to try and make it my career. I am also the Chair for the Upper Arkansas River Regional Advisory Committee, Chair for the Finney County Conservation District, and the President of the Upper Arkansas River Watershed Group. I'm here today to testify in support of HB 2541 on behalf of our 15,000 Kansas DU members and over 650,000 members nationwide.

Ducks Unlimited is a science-based conservation organization working to protect wetlands for waterfowl, wildlife and people. While we are a conservation organization, our membership is largely made up of sportsmen and women. Hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation have been part of Kansas' heritage since statehood – it's part of the state's fabric and identity. Kansas is an essential stopover for birds during their spring and fall migrations. This, combined with the upland habitats of the prairies, have provided a world-class wildlife resource that attracts tens of thousands of birders, hunters, and nature enthusiasts from across the country, and generates millions for the Kansas economy.

In Kansas, which is 98% privately owned, wildlife only exist through the cooperation and participation of Kansas farmers and ranchers, who host the wildlife we all enjoy. In privately owned, agricultural landscapes like Kansas, habitat conservation is the product of private public partnerships – through voluntary incentive-based programs, Ducks Unlimited has worked hand in hand with Kansas landowners to conserve habitat and improve working farms and ranches, and provide access for sportsmen and women. Federal programs, including the Farm Bill, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, provide resources and options for landowners to implement conservation practices in their operations which improve soil health, water quantity and quality, and provide wildlife habitat. Whether CRP, ALE, CSP, RCPP, NAWCA, NFWF, EQIP – there are too many acronyms to list, but there are some common themes with federal conservation programs: (1) They are popular with landowners - we have backlogs and waiting lists for nearly every program we work with; and (2) They typically require a non-federal match.

Our biggest challenge in Kansas is the lack of match for federal conservation programs – we typically tell Kansas landowners that wetland restoration will cost them 50 cents on the dollar, but that could change with a state-based conservation fund providing match for federal programs. The funding proposed in HB 2541 would help so many more Kansas landowners incorporate



conservation in their operations, and continue to support the state's natural resources for future generations.

I'd like to provide a couple of examples of the work we are doing in the state, and how the funding proposed in this bill would help those efforts. In the dry west, if you want wildlife, you need water, which is why DU's work in Kansas is so water-centric. In western Kansas, where I live, Farm Bill programs help producers restore Playas, the shallow, temporary wetlands that are critical in replenishing the Ogallala Aquifer, in addition to having a wide range of wildlife and water quality benefits. There are over 22,000 Playas in Kansas, with the potential to recharge the Aquifer with over 6 billion gallons of water. I've been working with landowners in western Kansas for several years, and many didn't realize they even had playas on their land. Interest in USDA programs to conserve playas has grown dramatically, and is only hampered by the producer cost share, which could be addressed through a state based fund like the one proposed in this bill.

Ducks Unlimited has also been involved in water quality and recreational projects with Kansas municipalities, all of whom would be eligible for funding under HB 2541. In eastern Kansas, DU is working with the City of Wellington, KDHE, EPA, and KDWP on a wetlands project to treat runoff into Wellington Lake. Once restored, enhanced, and managed, this property will have functioning wetlands that will improve the water quality at Wellington Lake, the city's primary water source. And more recently, DU partnered on the R. Michael Rhoades Wetland Park in Newton, KS, near the Newton Wastewater Treatment Plant, featuring wetlands, walking paths, boardwalks, education signs, custom murals, wildlife viewing, and unique birding-by-ear elements for vision-impaired visitors. HB 2541 could provide resources for more local communities to improve water quality and provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities.

Ducks Unlimited has been a member of the Kansans for Conservation Coalition since its inception, because state-based conservation funding has been a critical component for our habitat work across the country. For every dollar invested by the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), typically an additional \$2-3 in additional private and federal funding have been generated. NET has been critical for Nebraska's water quality and quantity, with projects ranging from stream restorations to irrigation improvements, restoring the Ogallala Aquifer. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) has been an important resource for improving and expanding hunting access on existing state wildlife areas. These neighboring state funds have also provided a boost to local rural economies, where most of these projects take place. In fact, it is not unusual for folks in the local café to ask our DU staff and contractors how much longer they are going to be in town when working on a conservation project.

DU has supported dedicated conservation funding in many states across the country, and applauds the Kansas Legislature for considering this unprecedented commitment to funding critical quality of life infrastructure. Investments in conservation, working lands, recreation, and outdoor education are investments in the future of Kansas. Thank you for your time, and your consideration of this important issue.