

Testimony to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Dan Meyerhoff, Executive Director
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Dan Meyerhoff, executive director for the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD). KACD represents the individual 105 conservation districts and 525 volunteer board members that serve on those boards. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2541 on behalf of KACD.

The mission statement of KACD and its member districts is “Providing local leadership to protect and improve Kansas Natural Resources through collaboration, education and implementation.”

Holding true to our mission statement, districts collaborate with a myriad of local, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to identify resource issues and prioritize actions and initiatives. KACD has been an active member of the Kansans For Conservation Coalition since our first meeting. We know that we can achieve much more working together with these organizations as we all have common goals.

Protection of our working lands in Kansas is essential to sustain and improve our natural resources. Water quantity and quality, improved soil health, drought resilience, productive rangelands and diverse wildlife habitats are critical to sustaining our family farms and ranches environmentally and economically as well as improving quality of life.

Kansas conservation districts are a primary local contact for our farmers and ranchers wanting to address their resource concerns on the 46,000,000+ acres of farm/ranchland in Kansas. In the 95 counties where USDA has a local service center, conservation districts are co-located with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and work closely with our federal partner to implement federal programs.

Some federal programs require or encourage a non-federal match to qualify and receive funding. Kansas leaves millions of federal dollars on the table each year because we do not have that non-federal match. Think of your return on

investment bringing in federal dollars from that match which in turn goes to protect our natural resources.

According to the NRCS Kansas Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, last year Kansas had \$86,000,000 in unfunded Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) applications. That underscores the critical importance of additional funding for conservation programs.

Many producers are uncomfortable working with federal agencies and would rather work with state agencies and conservation districts. State cost share programs tend to be less bureaucratic and require less paperwork, especially when addressing resource concerns on smaller acreages or applying a single practice.

Lets talk about the importance of conservation education and outreach as a critical part of addressing natural resource concerns on working lands.

Conservation districts work closely with many of our partners to reach thousands of elementary and high school students each year, educating our future generations on the importance of sustaining and protecting our natural resources.

Adult education is also critical as new research and technologies become available. This is not only necessary for our active producers, but also for the increasing number of absentee landowners that may not be as connected to the land and need to be educated on the importance of addressing natural resource concerns on their land.

Stewardship and responsible management of our working lands is the responsibility of us all. Conservation funding to promote long term sustainability and resilience of our working lands is not an expense, it is an investment. Visiting with a Jewell county farmer last week, they stated it is great to see that Kansas is not just talking about the need for additional conservation funding, but actually looking at taking action to address the need.

Kansas conservation districts stand ready to do our part implementing conservation programs and providing technical assistance to our farmers and ranchers through opportunities provided by HB 2541. We see this as a win-win for everyone. HB 2541 protects our environment, improves economic stability and enhances quality of life for all Kansans.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon and look forward to working with you to fund conservation in Kansas. I am happy to address any questions you may have.