



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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

From: Eran Sandquist, Director of Conservation Delivery – Midwest Region

Date: January 22nd, 2024

RE: HB 2541 – Establishing the state conservation fund

Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2541. Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever are members of the Kansans for Conservation coalition which has led the collaborative drafting process of HB 2541.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever are the nation's leading volunteer, membership-based upland conservation group. Our community of more than 400,000 supporters are a diverse group of hunters, farmers, ranchers, landowners, conservation enthusiasts, and wildlife officials. The common thread is all want to make a difference for wildlife by conserving or creating habitat. Since 1987 when the first chapter was started in Kansas, we have expanded to 42 locally led chapters, nearly 7,000 organizational members, and 40 full-time employees who have a rich history of meaningful wildlife habitat creation and enhancement.

Conservation is the proper management of our natural resources, and there are few investments more critical to supporting quality of life measures in the Sunflower State. The economic success, public health, and future generations of Kansans are dependent upon us maintaining and improving these resources. Currently, the state is failing to provide the proper funding for this work and is subsequently losing out on federal or private matching dollars to the 35 states that have already established dedicated conservation funding, including all four of our neighboring states.

In its current form, **the draft bill does not create any new financial obligation for Kansas taxpayers and would generate estimated funding of ~\$63.4 million.** These funds would provide matching resources for agricultural, conservation, and wildlife investments on private and public lands throughout the state.

The Case for Conservation Funding:

- Agriculture is the main function on nearly 90 percent of the land in Kansas, making ag production the state's largest economic sector and 6th in the nation. Likewise, agriculture is also critical to Kansas wildlife, habitat, and outdoor access (WIHA), which exists almost entirely on private lands and supports the state's \$1.8 billion outdoor recreation economy, including \$481 million in state and local taxes and providing 71,000 jobs. Voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs for farmers and ranchers are the backbone of wildlife habitat and deserve sustained financial commitment (**88% of Kansans agree this is a convincing reason to increase conservation funding in Kansas**). *Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis*

- Kansas' family farms are a part of our state's unique character and quality of life – but an average of 190 million tons of our most productive soil are lost or degraded every year. Investing in protecting Kansas' valuable soils and agricultural heritage will benefit all of us (**79% of Kansans agree this is a convincing reason to increase conservation funding in Kansas**). *Source: FM3 Research, New Bridge Strategy Survey*
- **Thirty-five other states have state-based conservation funds**, and it's time for Kansas to join their ranks by investing in quality-of-life infrastructure that builds communities, bolsters the economy, and attracts and maintains a top-notch workforce. *Source: Trust for Public Land*

Dedicated sustainable funding can have tremendous long-term benefits for Kansas' rich history of upland hunting and quality grassland habitat benefitting farmers and ranchers, water quality, wildlife, hunters, and the state's associated outdoor recreation and agricultural economies.

HB 2541 would build on our organization's nearly 500,000 acres of habitat accomplishments and more than \$10,000,000 spent on the wildlife and people of Kansas—and in a way we can *all* be proud of.

As outlined above and by our fellow coalition members, the establishment of state conservation funding benefiting 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.



Eran Sandquist
Director of Conservation Delivery – Midwest Region
Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever