

Before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Written-only testimony by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Proponent Testimony on HB 2541
January 22nd, 2024



Chairman Rahjes and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written remarks on HB 2541 and the dedication of state funds for land conservation efforts. The Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club, which is a statewide, nonpartisan, grassroots environmental organization with nearly 5000 members. We understand how important conservation efforts are for improving or maintaining the quality of our soil and preserving our ecosystems and habitats. The Sierra Club's view on land management and agriculture is grounded in the need to conserve our terrestrial and aquatic natural ecosystems and integrate ecologically sound farming practices with wildlife habitat. We support abundant healthy food and fiber for all communities while maintaining the fertility of the soil and protecting the Earth's climate and the native diversity of plants and animals. House bill 2541 is a solid step toward enhanced and expanded conservation efforts, which Kansas is overdue for.

The State of Kansas has a key role in helping our agriculture be more ecologically sound, expanding wildlife habitat, and offering recreation for Kansans to enjoy and explore the land. HB 2541 would help.

We recognize the realities of human use of land, water, energy, and other resources, but we must recognize its impact on our ecosystems for which life on earth depends. Unfortunately, agriculture and land degradation due to development have created some of the largest negative impacts to land and water in Kansas, nationally, and globally. Common current practices such as large-scale mono cropping and concentrated animal feeding systems consume disproportionate amounts of fossil fuels, pollute our water and air, deplete the soil, diminish biodiversity, and emit greenhouse gases. Such practices are neither economically, ecologically nor socially sustainable. While Kansas does have several acres (in the millions) under conservation management in agriculture, the acreage amounts to only a fraction (14%) of our total lands (as identified in the 2017 Ag Census). Kansas is also one of the worst states in the U.S. when it comes to available acres for public use/enjoyment. So, Kansas needs an expeditious transition to farming methods and land uses that maximize both cultural and biological diversity, benefit local communities, improve rural and urban livelihoods, and preserve natural resources and habitats. HB 2541 would help Kansans go in that direction.

Incorporating land conservation practices in farming and habitat protection helps align our agricultural and land use enterprises with the preservation of our ecosystems. HB 2541 would help landowners and other stewards better implement eco-friendly projects with more resources and capacity. A dedicated funding stream would also be highly beneficial in leveraging federal funding opportunities when local grant matches are required, or continuing state efforts when federal funding runs dry.

Additional considerations for HB 2541 for the Kansas Legislature to consider.

We expect the funds will go to projects that offer benefits broadly to Kansans rather than to bail out bad actors. Sierra Club recommends project funds be utilized for long lasting benefits, instead of short-term results that could be diminished when programs end or when crop prices change. We urge the State to prioritize some funds specifically for Kansas Tribes or other historically underserved communities.

State funding of \$63 million with HB 2541 is a good start for expanding conservation in Kansas. Yet, safeguarding and improving our lands and habitats are worth much more investment and policy attention if you ask us. Nevertheless, we support HB 2541 and hope you will pass the bill this year. Thank you.

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The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to enjoying, exploring, and protecting our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for nearly fifty years.