

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2279

House Committee on Water

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Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Rex Buchanan. I am the Director Emeritus of the Kansas Geological Survey, where I worked from 1978 to 2016. I still help out a little, mostly on earthquake-related issues and annual water-level measurements, but I am for the most part retired. I am speaking here today on my own behalf and want to make it absolutely clear that I am not representing the Geological Survey.

I grew up on a farm in central Kansas and have spent most of my life in the state. I still own ground in central Kansas. Having been engaged in natural resource issues for much of my time here, I believe water in general and the depletion of the High Plains aquifer in particular are among the most important long-term issues facing the state. House Bill 2279 is a reasonable step toward extending the life of the High Plains aquifer.

I cannot speak to the financial reporting requirements in Section 1 of the bill. But I do think that requiring a plan to deal with groundwater depletion, as outlined in Section 2, is an appropriate expectation for groundwater management districts. In fact, this bill represents a management approach that combines local control, in the form of groundwater management districts, with state control. By Kansas law, water is a public resource that is dedicated to the use of the people of the state. Thus the state has a part to play in this process. Combining local and state efforts in a cooperative way is, I believe, a creative and typically Kansan approach to solving this problem.

Having said that, I do think that some of the details of the bill require more specificity and definition, particularly in terms of "areas of concern." Various approaches and models can help identify those areas and assess their prospects. Additional monitoring, index wells, the Q stable method, and aquifer models can contribute here. For example, work at the Geological Survey in the early 2000s identified areas within the groundwater management districts that helped form the basis for delineating the first Local Enhanced Management Area, or LEMA. The resulting Sheridan County LEMA has been a true success story for water management in the state, perhaps even the nation.

But developing additional groundwater data and models, as important as that is, should not defer action. Groundwater declines have been apparent for decades. And while declines have slowed in some areas, the most recent data show that declines over the High Plains groundwater monitoring network were greater last year than any year, save one, since 1995. Obviously much of that decline was related to drought. But droughts only exacerbate long-term trends.

We know enough today to take this action. Asking the groundwater management districts to present a plan of response is reasonable, appropriate, and, if anything, overdue.

Thank you again for this opportunity. And thank you for the time and attention you are devoting to this critical issue.