



Proponent Testimony on HB 2063
John Ritchey, Regional Director, Ducks Unlimited
Kansas House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
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Good afternoon Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue. My name is John Ritchey and I'm a Regional Director for Ducks Unlimited based just outside of St. George, Kansas. I've been with Ducks Unlimited for 23 years, and I'm here today to testify in support of HB 2063 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 exists 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 which improve soil health, water quantity and quality, and provide wildlife habitat. 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.

I'd like to provide a couple of examples of the work DU is 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, Farm Bill programs help producers restore Playas, the shallow, temporary wetlands that are critical in replenishing the Ogallala Aquifer. 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 2063. 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, and improve the water quality for 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 2063 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 an important part of 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, and restoring the Ogallala Aquifer. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) has helped to expand 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.