

**House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Neutral Testimony of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
House Bill 2268**

March 17, 2025

Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee,

For generations, Kansans have enjoyed a rich tradition of waterfowl hunting because of our location within the Central Flyway—a waterfowl migration route extending across North America. Kansas is blessed with a variety of habitat landscapes that attract migratory waterfowl.

Over the past 15 years, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has restored and enhanced many wetland areas on both private and public lands. Through partnerships with organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and with the assistance of federal grants, KDWP been able to restore and establish several new waterfowl habitats. Kansas residents often spearhead restoration efforts by raising the matching funds for wetland projects. For example, renovation of Cheyenne Bottoms—a world-renowned 19,000-acre wetland in Barton County—was facilitated by local Ducks Unlimited chapters in partnership with KDWP. Cheyenne Bottoms is now a major destination for waterfowl hunters from all over the world.

Yet with success comes new challenges. Over the past decade, non-resident waterfowl hunters have noticed our improved habitat, which draws more waterfowl. In addition, Kansas, unlike other states in the Central Flyway, has few restrictions on waterfowl hunting and very few public lands.

Non-resident waterfowl pressure on our limited public lands has increased significantly. In 2006, non-residents accounted for only 19 percent of all waterfowl hunters in Kansas. By the 2015-2016 waterfowl season, the share of non-residents waterfowl hunters had increased to 27 percent. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, nonresident hunting habits changed drastically. With more time to hunt, more non-residents began hunting consecutive days and weeks, whereas they had historically hunted only a few days or weekends. KDWP data indicates that during the 2020-2021 season, the percent of non-resident waterfowl hunters increased to 40 percent of all waterfowl hunters.

The 2020-2021 waterfowl season was also the first-time non-resident hunters outnumbered resident hunters at Cheyenne Bottoms (51 percent nonresidents to 49 percent residents). Similarly, Neosho Wetlands near St. Paul, experienced an increase of non-resident waterfowl hunters from 35 percent in the 2018-2019 season to 50 percent non-resident hunters in the 2020-2021 season.

With the increase in hunting pressure in 2020, KDWP began fielding many more complaints from Kansas residents who felt they were being “crowded out” by non-resident hunters, which coincided with KDWP data reflecting an increase in pressure on public properties.

Beginning in January 2021, Kansas waterfowl hunters started voicing their concerns at Kansas Wildlife Commission meetings. Since then, commissioners and KDWP staff have continued to field complaints from resident waterfowl hunters who believe that if the status quo remains, they will no longer be able to pass along the tradition of waterfowl hunting to younger generations. KDWP staff also began noticing a change in waterfowl behavior caused by large groups of non-residents hunters occupying specific wetlands for several consecutive days, thereby discouraging waterfowl from using the wetlands for dietary and resting needs.

And non-resident hunting trends have not changed. Since the 2020-2021 season, the percentage of statewide non-resident waterfowl hunters has remained stable at around 41 percent. To decide on an appropriate course of action, KDWP gathered additional data, conducted more research, consulted with other states that restrict non-resident waterfowl hunters, and conferred with its federal partners at the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Bureau of Reclamation, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

In April 2023, the Secretary of KDWP proposed to the Wildlife Commission a three-day restriction on non-resident waterfowl hunting on public lands and waters and stated a desire for a legislative change permitting KDWP to charge non-resident waterfowl hunters a higher fee for waterfowl stamps. The Commission discussed and solicited public input on this proposal between April 2023 and January 2024. However, due to the passage of House Bill 2648 in the 2024 legislative session, the proposed regulation was put on hold.

House Bill 2268 would restrict non-resident waterfowl hunters to hunting on Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays on department lands and waters and specified federal lands and waters. Importantly, it would have no effect on hunting on private lands, property enrolled and designated as either a walk-in hunting access area or an interactive walk-in hunting access area, navigable rivers, and KDWP’s Special Hunts Program or other department authorized waterfowl outreach programs. Finally, House Bill 2268 would establish caps for resident and non-resident waterfowl stamps. Currently, only one category exists with a cap of \$8. The new

caps would be set at \$20 for residents and \$100 for nonresidents. It should be noted that because the current fee is set at \$8 for all waterfowl hunters, KDWP's ability to raise the fee on resident or non-resident hunters will be restricted by H.B. 2648 (2024).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information regarding House Bill 2268. I am happy to provide additional information at the appropriate time.

Respectfully submitted,

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