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**Testimony before the House Water Committee
Neutral with Concerns on HB 2477
By
Orrin Feril
On Behalf of Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5
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Chairman Minnix and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to HB 2477. I am Orrin Feril, providing this testimony on behalf of Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 (Big Bend).

HB 2477 promotes transparency and strengthens communication around water rights and water use in Kansas. Under current practice, information about water appropriation applications and changes in point of diversion is not easily accessible or visible to nearby landowners. As a result, individuals and communities are left unaware of proposed changes that could impact groundwater resources, surface water interactions, and local water management.

As proposed, this bill would direct the Kansas Department of Agriculture to maintain and publish a digital map on its official website that shows the location of all water appropriation applications (per K.S.A. 82a-711 and change applications that exceed 300 feet per K.S.A. 82a-708b. Making this information publicly available and in a geographic format would provide nearby landowners and water users with a clearer understanding of applications that may affect shared water resources.

Additionally, HB 2477 further clarifies that notification of applications per K.S.A. 82a-711 and K.S.A. 82a-708b (for changes exceeding 300 feet) should be provided to nearby landowners, rather than nearby water right owners. This change improves upon the current standard helps ensure that potentially affected parties have timely notice and a meaningful opportunity to understand and respond to proposed actions in their area.

While Big Bend supports the increased transparency and improved notification provisions included in HB 2477, we have significant concerns regarding the proposed revision to K.S.A. 82a-745 related to notification requirements for Water Conservation Areas (WCAs). Although WCAs are not permanent in nature, the groundwater impacts associated with their implementation are real, measurable and experienced regionally. These impacts can directly affect nearby senior water rights. Eliminating the requirement to notify nearby water right owners of a WCA reduces transparency and limits the ability of affected water users to understand and respond to actions that influence aquifer conditions. From Big Bend's perspective, this change weakens, rather than strengthens, Kansas water policy and represents a step backward in effective groundwater management.

Big Bend respectfully encourages the committee to carefully evaluate the implications of this provision. It is the intent of Big Bend to continue to pursue a sound water policy within central Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2477. It is always beneficial to have conversations such as the discussions generated by these hearings. Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 is ready and willing to continue to be a productive partner in those conversations. We look forward to working with your committee to promote a sound water policy in Kansas.