



**Before the
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony on HB 2517
Tracy Streeter, Kansas Water Authority Secretary and Kansas Water Office Director
February 1, 2012**

Chairman Powell and members of the Committee, I am Tracy Streeter, Secretary of the Kansas Water Authority and Director of the Kansas Water Office. This proposed legislation has been endorsed by the Kansas Water Authority and is also supported by the Ogallala Aquifer Advisory Committee, an *ad hoc* committee established by the Kansas Water Authority to make recommendations on ways to conserve and extend the life of the Ogallala aquifer. As Secretary of the Authority, I represent both entities in support of the proposed changes to WaterTAP presented in House Bill 2517.

The Water Right Transition Assistance Program (WaterTAP) is a voluntary, incentive based program to permanently retire irrigation water rights in water stressed areas. It is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Division of Conservation. It is only eligible in targeted areas closed to new water appropriations. WaterTAP provides payments for the permanent dismissal of all or a portion of a water right, based on its consumptively used portion and the owner's bid rate, up to the State's cap. WaterTAP allows the land to remain in agricultural production.

Authorized as a five year pilot program, it began enrollments in 2007. WaterTAP has been successful over the past few years in attracting high value water rights. Priority areas in Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District (GMD) 4 had a number of acres enrolled into the USDA Agriculture Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), which pays irrigators to transition acres to dryland agriculture for six years. WaterTAP has been able to attract bids for permanent water right retirement on land enrolled into AWEP, generally at a discounted price. The GMD 4's Groundwater Foundation also contributed to the water retirement payments, which furthers the reach of WaterTAP's state dollars.

In 2011, Southwest Kansas GMD 3 was awarded an USDA AWEP grant to transition priority areas to dryland use. This presents new opportunities to coordinate WaterTAP with acres enrolled into AWEP targeted areas within GMD3, to attract bids from participating farmers who are willing to permanently dismiss all or a portion of their water right. West Central Kansas GMD1 is also looking at options to attract WaterTAP as part of their conservation goals.

Voluntary conservation programs such as WaterTAP are important tools to help conserve and extend the life of the Ogallala aquifer. Eligible only in focused, priority areas, it can be a valuable component for a region to reach new conservation goals.

Thank you for considering our support to make WaterTAP a permanent conservation program.