

My name is Dan Ward, and I'm the Executive Director of the Kansas Wildlife Federation. KWF is a 53-year old organization dedicated to the wise use, conservation, appreciation, and the restoration of our state's wildlife and natural environment. We approach this mission primarily from the perspective of hunting and fishing, which are important traditions in Kansas. Over 500,000 hunters and anglers spend close to one billion dollars in the state each year.

KWF has taken an interest in the issue of commercial wind energy in Kansas for a number of reasons that we feel have been under publicized. Wind turbines sited along bird migration routes have an immense and well-documented impact on ducks, geese, hawks, songbirds, and other birds. Both the greater and the lesser prairie-chicken, birds that are emblematic of the Great Plains, are unable to nest in the shadows of these machines. One commercial scale project could prevent breeding in a 25-square mile area.

In addition, we strongly feel that the intact heritage grasslands of Kansas are irreplaceable pieces of American history. In particular, the Flint Hills are North America's last great tallgrass prairie and converting this land to industrial development makes as little sense as burying Gettysburg under a dam, or building a factory on top of Mount Vernon. KWF does support wind energy projects in cropland areas that are out of the path of migratory bird routes.

The legislature has delegated decision-making around wind energy to the county level. This means that in order to make effective and smart decisions, Kansans will have to involve themselves in local politics, and will have to arm themselves with the very best information available on commercial wind power, on wildlife, on tourism, and a host of other subjects.

KWF supports SB 331 because its passage will help give local government and local voters a chance to make fully informed decisions. It makes a difference whether there are one or ten proposed projects in a county. It makes a difference if I know whether my neighbor's actions will result in a drop in my property's value.

Democracy works best when the facts are out in the open, and SB 331 will put much-needed sunlight onto the issue of commercial wind development. We hope this committee will take rapid action to pass this bill out onto the Senate floor.