

February 18, 2020

State of Kansas House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture State Capitol Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: Written Testimony of the Natural Resources Defense Council in Support of the Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act (HB 2623)

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and our over 17,000 Kansas members and online activists, we submit this testimony in strong support of HB 2623, the Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act. The act benefits farmers, solar operators, and bees by allowing solar operators to advertise their sites as "pollinator friendly" if they meet voluntary criteria outlined in a state pollinator "scorecard."

Bees, birds, and other pollinators are a critical part of Kansas's agricultural economy. Top crops like canola depend on bees, while other staple crops, such as cotton, can benefit from bee pollination in the form of higher yields. In addition to traditional managed honey bees, Kansas is also home to hundreds of species of native pollinators—many of which are beneficial to crop production and essential to the state's breathtaking wildflowers and other plant and animal life.

In recent years, however, bees and other pollinators have been dying at an alarming rate—with over 55% of the state's honey bees dying in the last year alone.¹ Although pollinators face a host of challenges, a leading problem is the lack of high-quality habitat providing the food and shelter they need to survive.

The Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act helps bees and other pollinators by providing a voluntary incentive to solar operators to convert unused land into high quality habitat. Operators whose sites adhere to guidance published by Kansas University's Biological Survey would be allowed to advertise those sites as benefiting pollinators. This guidance would take the form of a "scorecard," with points assigned for both the quality and quantity of habitat planted, emphasizing the planting of native Kansas species. Sites meeting the required number of points may be advertised as "pollinator friendly," provided the operator makes the completed scorecard and accompanying vegetation management plan available to the state Biological Survey, any state nonprofit solar industry trade associations, and the public.

¹ See Bee Informed Partnership, Colony Loss Map (accessed Feb. 13, 2020), <u>https://bit.ly/2HpheoW</u>, and select "Annual" under the "Season" menu.

Several other states have passed pollinator-friendly solar site legislation, often with strong bipartisan or even unanimous support. These include: Illinois (525 ILCS 55/1 et seq.); Maryland (Md. Code, Nat. Res. § 3-303.1); Minnesota (MN Stat. § 216B.1642); Missouri (Mo. Stat. § 261.500); South Carolina (S.C. Code § 50-4-30); and Vermont (6 V.S. § 5102).²

By encouraging operators to provide new homes for bees and other pollinators at solar sites in rural areas across the state, the Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act represents a win-win for farmers, solar operators, beekeepers, and, of course, bees. NRDC strongly supports this bill.

Respectfully,

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Local Contacts:

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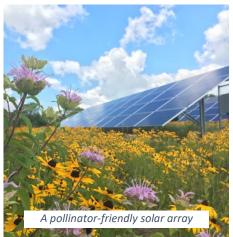
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² State scorecards are available online for: Illinois (<u>https://bit.ly/2PR02f8</u>); Maryland (<u>https://bit.ly/39uSYvl</u>); Michigan (<u>https://bit.ly/2OTGG7M</u>); Minnesota (<u>https://bit.ly/2CehJNF</u> [for project planning] and <u>https://bit.ly/2pIcMt0</u> [for established projects]); and Vermont (<u>https://bit.ly/2wcwQUv</u>).

Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act

Summary – The Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act benefits farmers, solar operators, and bees by allowing solar operators to advertise their sites as "pollinator friendly" if they meet voluntary criteria outlined in a state pollinator "scorecard."

Background – Bees, birds, and other pollinators are a critical part of Kansas's agricultural economy. Top crops like canola depend on bees, while other major staple crops, such as cotton, can benefit from bee pollination in the form of higher yields. In addition to traditional managed honey bees, Kansas is also home to hundreds of species of



native pollinators—many of which are beneficial to crop production and essential to the state's breathtaking wildflowers and other plant animal life.

In recent years, however, bees and other pollinators have been dying at an alarming rate—with over 38% of the state's honey bees dying in the last year alone.¹ Although pollinators face a host of challenges, a leading problem is the loss of high quality habitat providing the food and shelter they need to survive.

What Does the Act Do? – The Kansas Solar Pollinator Habitat Act helps bees and other pollinators by providing a voluntary incentive to solar operators to convert unused land into high quality habitat. Operators whose sites adhere to guidance published by the Kansas Biological Survey would be allowed to advertise those sites as "pollinator friendly." This guidance would take the form of a "scorecard," with points assigned for both the quality and quantity of habitat planted, emphasizing the planting of native Kansas species. Sites meeting the required number of points may be advertised as "pollinator friendly," provided the operator makes the completed scorecard and accompanying vegetation management plan available to the Biological Survey, any solar industry groups, and the public.

By encouraging operators to provide new homes for bees and other pollinators at solar sites in rural areas across the state, the act represents a win-win for farmers, solar operators, beekeepers, and, of course, bees.

Pollinator Friendly Solar Laws Across the U.S. – Several other states have passed pollinatorfriendly solar site legislation, including: Illinois (525 ILCS 55/1 et seq.); Maryland (Md. Code, Nat. Res. § 3-303.1); Minnesota (MN Stat. § 216B.1642); Missouri (Mo. Stat. § 261.500); South Carolina (S.C. Code § 50-4-30); and Vermont (6 V.S. § 5102).²

¹ See Bee Informed Partnership, Colony Loss Map (visited Nov. 5, 2019), <u>https://bit.ly/2HpheoW</u>, and select "Annual" under the "Season" menu.

² State scorecards are available online for: Illinois (<u>https://bit.ly/2PR02f8</u>); Minnesota (<u>https://bit.ly/2CehJNF</u> [for project planning] and <u>https://bit.ly/2pIcMt0</u> [for established projects]); and Vermont (<u>https://bit.ly/2wcwQUv</u>).