



**To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chair**

**From: Justin Cobb, Legislative Chair of Kansans for Conservation**

**Date: January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**

**RE: HB 2541 – Establishing a state conservation fund**

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Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2541. The Kansans for Conservation coalition led the collaborative drafting process of this bill, and it is my pleasure to give you an overview of the coalition and the process it embarked upon.

Kansans for Conservation was founded in 2017 with the convening of conservation organizations to discuss the lack of available match for federal programs and other funding opportunities. These programs, many of which are permanently available and offer hundreds of millions of dollars annually, frequently require substantial match that non-state entities cannot provide. Many of the attendees at the coalition's first meeting had worked with colleagues across state lines that had access to state funding for their efforts. From this deficit came the coalition's sole and lasting purpose of establishing state conservation funding in Kansas.

In pursuing its mission, the coalition undertook multiple needs assessments to determine the areas and scale requisite to appropriately fund conservation in Kansas. The most recent one was conducted in early 2023 and balanced the state's areas of greatest need with the highest available non-state match opportunities. In conjunction with this effort, the coalition conducted comparative analyses of other states with such funding. As Kansas is one of only fifteen states without dedicated conservation funding, there were many examples to learn from but a great variety in approach to both structure and funding. Once the coalition had a base of knowledge established, it began drafting the bill.

Throughout the drafting process, the coalition strove to adhere to three principles; no new government, no new taxes or fees, and streamlined funding. The coalition believes that the existing state agency structure provides the capacity and expertise to administer these funds without a new entity. Additionally, it is the coalition's stance that there are surpluses or inefficiencies within existing state revenue that can be adjusted to invest into conservation and achieve a higher return on a crucial infrastructure issue. To guide these decisions on funding, the coalition relied heavily on public polling and included in HB 2541 the three most popular conservation funding sources as identified by Kansans. Lastly, the coalition worked closely with the Departments of Agriculture and Wildlife and Parks to draft a structure that would be limited in bureaucracy and efficiently implement funding into on-the-ground conservation.

As you examine the span of the coalition's 33 member organizations, you will see a breadth of diversity unlike any other. Organizations representing agriculture, energy, wildlife, parks, and more came together and achieved consensus on HB 2541 because conservation is a core, essential value to all of these organizations and the Kansans they represent. Just as these

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organizations committed to working through their differences to draft HB 2541, we are similarly committed to working with this committee on any concerns you may have.

To accommodate the time available for today's hearing, we have narrowed our member testimony to four organizations who are leaders in agriculture, soil health, wildlife conservation, and outdoor recreation and who will discuss how this bill supports the success of their respective sectors.

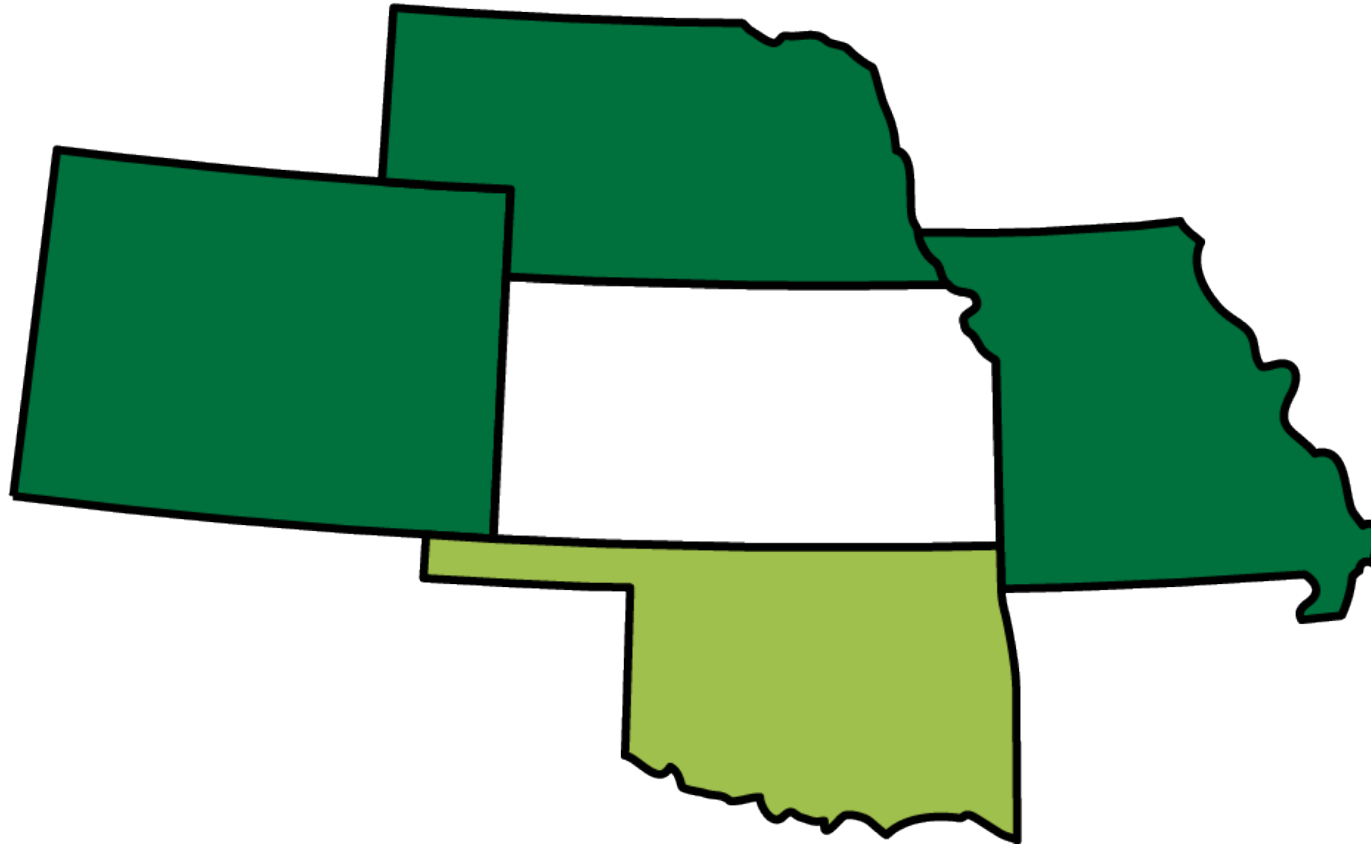
Thank you, Chairman Rahjes, for arranging this hearing during the coalition's Day at the Capitol and enabling our supporters to make the most of their trip to Topeka. Hopefully all of you had the opportunity to meet with some of them today, and if not, many will be available after this hearing to discuss their perspectives on supporting HB 2541.

Thank you once again for your consideration of HB 2541 and we look forward to working with you to fund conservation in Kansas. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

*Kansans for Conservation Members*

Audubon of Kansas – Backcountry Hunters and Anglers - Bowersock Mills & Power Co.  
The Conservation Fund – Ducks Unlimited - Evergy – FarmTender, LLC – Friends of the Kaw  
General Mills – Heartland Tree Alliance - Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams  
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts - Kansas Association of Wheat Growers  
Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education  
Kansas Black Farmers Association – Kansas Corn Growers Association – Kansas Farm Bureau  
Kansas Farmer's Union – Kansas Forestry Association – Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition  
Kansas Land Trust – Kansas Recreation & Park Association – Kansas Rural Center  
Kansas Soil Health Alliance – Kansas Wildlife Federation – The Nature Conservancy  
No Till on the Plains - Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever – Playa Lakes Joint Venture  
Ranchland Trust of Kansas – Ringneck Classic, Inc – State Association of Kansas Watersheds  
Walton's Inc





Kansas is **1** of **15** states without dedicated conservation funding



Constitutionally protected conservation funding



State-Tribal compacts dedicated to conservation funding

Needs Assessment(s)



Feasibility Study



Drafting

## No New Government

- Utilize existing structure to the greatest extent possible with minimal growth

## No New Taxes or Fees

- Redirect budget surpluses, inefficiencies, or conservation related dollars

## Streamline Funding

- Move dollars from the state to on-the-ground conservation as efficiently as possible

# Proportion of Kansas Voters who Would Vote For Each Tax Mechanism if it is Dedicated to Funding Conservation

