

**Kansas Farm Bureau
Policy Statement**

**House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
SB 124; An act concerning water**

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Submitted by:
Kent Askren
Water Resources Specialist
KFB Natural Resources Division**

Chairman Powell and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 124 relating to water supply access storage and creating the Lower Smoky Hill Water Supply Access program. I am Kent Askren, Water Resources Specialist for the Kansas Farm Bureau. As written, KFB stands in support of SB 124.

In early 2007, following an extended dry period, Kanopolis Reservoir water levels were seven feet below conservation pool which resulted in the Kansas Water Office proposing more aggressive management including a **proposal to alter the longstanding standard water release schedule** followed by the Corps of Engineers.

For **decades water released from Kanopolis has been treated as natural flows of the Smoky Hill River** therefore making it eligible for appropriation by authority of the Chief Engineer of the Division of Water Resources. Downstream of Kanopolis Reservoir to the confluence with the Saline River there are over **90 irrigation water rights** that have been developed and depend upon the natural flows of the Smoky Hill River.

Irrigation water rights enhance agriculture production and provide consistency during water short years. Increased input costs, such as fertilizer and seed, associated with irrigated agriculture generally result in more dollars being spent locally and greater yield potential which helps the local/regional economies.

Recognizing that **changing the standard release schedule has potentially negative impacts** on agriculture, public water supplies and other beneficial uses of water, efforts

by stakeholders, farm organizations, public water suppliers and agency staff have been ongoing to explore the potential to access water stored in Kanopolis Reservoir to help offset the impacts of more aggressive water management.

Under current state programs, irrigation use is not eligible for access to state owned storage except for seasonal surplus contracts. The Kansas Water Authority has approved moving forward with legislation proposing to grant access to stored water by creating the **Lower Smoky Hill water supply access program** and granting agriculture access to storage through the creation of the **Smoky Hill River irrigation special district**.

If efforts to modify the standard release schedule from Kanopolis move forward to improve the overall efficiencies of the system, we believe the longstanding water rights which were developed using water releases from Kanopolis must be protected by allowing them to access the state controlled stored water in Kanopolis Reservoir. Without such a program, the **potential for catastrophic crop failure** and the subsequent **economic loss to individual, local and regional economies will be devastating**.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comment and would be happy to address questions at the appropriate time.