

901 S. Kansas Avenue
Topeka, KS 66612



Phone: (785)-296-3185
Fax: (785)-296-0878
www.kwo.org

Tracy Streeter, Director

Sam Brownback, Governor

**Before the
Senate Ways and Means Committee
Testimony on Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
Earl Lewis, Kansas Water Office Assistant Director
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, I am Earl Lewis, Assistant Director of the Kansas Water Office. I am pleased to appear before you today in support of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

The origins of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in Kansas can be traced to the 2001 update of the Kansas Water Plan related to the Ogallala-High Plains Aquifer. The public input during that update was considerable with more than 50 stakeholder and general public meetings held across western Kansas. The need for a water right retirement program to allow producers to remain financially stable while transitioning to dry land farming was a consistent message. The Kansas Water Authority adopted this approach into the Kansas Water Plan at their November 2001 meeting in Dodge City.

The legislature has discussed water right retirement multiple times with bills to develop a state level program before the legislature in 2004 and 2005, and an interim committee in the fall of 2004. Ultimately, the state program known as the Water Transition Assistance Program (WaterTAP) was developed and implemented through statute. A bill to make WaterTAP a permanent program has passed out of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and is awaiting action on the House floor.

The CREP program was developed as a unique opportunity to use damage award proceeds from Colorado and federal funds to meet the Kansas Water Plan objectives in a manner similar to what is established in the state water right retirement program. Legislation enabling the CREP passed the Senate in 2007 with a vote of 37-3. The program has also been in each appropriation bill since that time.

Implementation of the CREP program has been a success as marginal land in areas of ground water decline has been enrolled. Continued enrollment will further reduce the demands placed on the aquifer in these areas and extend the life of the aquifer for those producers who remain. Making the program permanent will provide stability and allow area farmers to include this option in their future plans. I urge your support for passage of language to make CREP a permanent program.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.