

Testimony in Support of SB 194
Western KS GMD #1 & NW Kansas GMD #4
By Sean Miller
To the Senate Ag & Natural Resources Committee
Monday, March 20, 2017

Chairman Kerschen, members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify in support of SB 194, related to the assessment authority of groundwater management districts. As a quick background, Groundwater Management Districts (GMDs) were authorized by the state legislature in 1972, as a recognition of “the right of local water users to determine their destiny with respect to the use of the groundwater...” There are currently five GMDs in Kansas, overlying the vast majority of the Ogallala and High Plains aquifers within Kansas. These GMDs are overseen by locally selected Boards of Directors representing both geographic and industry segments of water users within their boundaries.

SB 194 would increase the existing statutory cap on GMD assessments, raising the allowable rate from \$1 per acre-foot to \$1.50 per acre-foot and the ‘out of district’ (where more than half of the water is utilized outside the district boundaries) from \$1.50 per acre-foot to \$2 per acre-foot. Additionally it would increase the assessment on land within the district (40 or more contiguous acres, does not apply within city limits) from \$0.05/acre to \$0.10/acre.

The assessments currently collected by each of the GMDs varies significantly as each individual district faces different challenges and opportunities. From water quality and pollution issues, to interstate water challenges, to the opportunity to conserve water through cooperative management and the adoption and perfection of new irrigation technology, GMDs and individual water users will need additional tools, and probably additional money, to implement the concepts and collect the data necessary to monitor the success of these programs.

As a result of the recent Governor’s Water Visioning process there has been a great deal of research and input from local stakeholders related to local needs and projects. Part of this process was the development of Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) that were able to drill down into items of importance to local communities and producers. This RAC process has not only identified projects significant to the continued viability of local communities, it has also energized the local stakeholder base. To that end the Kansas Water Authority developed a priority list of projects to be funded by the annual \$8 million state appropriation for water projects. Unfortunately it has been a decade since that appropriation has been made in full. The GMDs support the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force recommendation that the state fulfill their statutory funding obligation, but even if that were to occur, \$8 million is not enough to fund all the projects at the local level. This is where local budgets, developed by local stakeholders, and funded by a local assessment become critical to extending the life of the aquifer in Kansas.

Chairman Kerschen, thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony today in support of increasing the cap on GMD assessments contained in SB 194. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

