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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Proponent on HB 2634
By
Orrin Feril
On Behalf of Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5
March 13, 2024

Chairman Peck and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to HB 2634. I am Orrin Feril, providing this testimony on behalf of Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 (Big Bend).

Big Bend understands that HB 2634 seeks to add increased flexibilities regarding water allocations within an intensive groundwater use control area (IGUCA) or local enhanced management area (LEMA). Big Bend supports the concept of providing flexibility to water users provided that there is an overall conservation of water in the process. As the committee may be aware, Big Bend has two IGUCA plans in place and has considered several iterations of LEMA plans in the past. Having the provisions that HB 2634 would provide could assist the local boards with developing plans for long-term success as it would provide area water users with resiliency against changing weather patterns.

Water users in Central KS are uniquely positioned in the state with regards to water resources. The local Great Bend Prairie aquifer is highly connected to surface hydrology in a large portion of Big Bend. As a result, the water resources respond quickly to both drought (lowering water table) and precipitation events (raising water table). This provides interesting challenges to balance both needs for water, especially in times of drought. As a result, the local board needs tools that provide flexibility while maintaining conservation requirements. The provisions laid out in HB 2634 will assist with this effort.

Big Bend would strongly encourage the committee to move forward with this bill to provide water users with much needed flexibility in these special management areas. It is the intent of Big Bend to continue to pursue a sound water policy within Central KS. Providing flexibility to area water users while requiring conservation has been a cornerstone of Big Bend water policy for several decades.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2634. It is always beneficial to have conversations such as the discussions generated by these hearings. Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 is ready and willing to continue to be a productive partner in those conversations. We look forward to working with your committee to promote a sound water policy in Kansas.