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**Overview of the Division of Conservation Programs and the State Water Plan
To the House Vision 2020 Committee
by Greg A. Foley, Executive Director, State Conservation Commission
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Chairperson Sloan and members of the Committee, thank you for the privilege to provide a briefing on Conservation Commission programs, State Water Plan funding and the ongoing natural resource protection implementation activities. I would like to begin the discussion by reviewing the State Water Plan Programs under the administration of the Division of Conservation.

The Division of Conservation (DOC), working with 105 local conservation districts, 88 organized watershed districts, other special purpose districts and state and federal entities, administers 11 programs. These programs improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, conserve water, reduce flood potential and provide local water supply.

State Aid to Conservation Districts, also known as Matching Funds, is a grant program providing financial assistance to Kansas Conservation Districts. The K.S.A. 2-1907c authorizes the state to match up to \$25,000 per district of the annual amount allocated to conservation districts by the board of county commissioners. These funds assist county conservation districts to effectively deliver **local, state, and federal** natural resource programs as prescribed under the Conservation District Law (K.S.A. 2-1901 et seq.). In FY 2014, \$2,322,690 of matching funds was allocated to conservation districts. The Conservation Districts function through a partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), NRCS provides offices, equipment, phones, etc. for 95 of the 105 Conservation Districts. In addition, NRCS provides the conservation planning, practice design, stakeout, and final inspections for most of the SWP funded programs.

- Maintaining Conservation Districts and USDA service center partnerships are a high priority of the Kansas Department of Agriculture. This partnership provides financial and technical assistance to landowners and is critical in every county in Kansas to achieve or maintain their conservation plans as per requirements in the 2014 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill links basic conservation practices and "Conservation Compliance" to crop insurance premium subsidies for highly erodible lands. The 2013 crop insurance data shows that 19,178,056 acres were insured with a total of \$851,688,172 of total premiums and losses paid in the amount of \$954,345,698. If Kansas landowners, owning or operating highly erodible land, fail to reach or maintain compliance with their conservation plan, they will be ineligible for the federal crop insurance subsidy that ranges from \$0.55 to \$0.75 on every dollar. This federal subsidy equates to nearly a half of a **billion** dollars annually.

Watershed Dam Construction, Water Supply Restoration and Multipurpose Small Lakes Programs. The Watershed Dam Construction Program provides financial assistance to organized watershed districts, drainage districts, or other special-purpose districts for the construction and the rehabilitation of flood control dams. In FY 2014, there were thirteen rehabilitation projects funded for a total of \$641,515.98. The Water Supply Restoration Program provides financial assistance to public water supply sponsors to restore water supply systems. In FY 2014, there was one on-going project with Osage City in the amount of \$286,868 for the restoration of Osage City Lake. These funds are being used to restore public water supply storage in the lake by removing accumulated sediment in the lake. The Multipurpose Small Lakes Program provides for "add-on" features to provide for additional benefits during the development of a proposed flood control structure. A planned flood control structure may become multipurpose by adding water supply storage and/or recreation. There are no MPSLP projects at this time.

Water Resources Cost Share. The Water Resources Cost-Share Program (WRCSP) provides financial incentives to landowners for the establishment of conservation practices that reduce soil erosion, improve or protect water quality, and enhance water supplies. The majority of these funds were directly allocated to conservation districts for local and state priorities. Water quality protection through reduction of soil erosion was the major focus of the program. In FY 2014, cost-share in the amount of \$1,912,919 was provided to landowners for the installation of 1065 practices. Practices receiving the majority of funds included terraces, waterways, ponds, grass plantings, and pasture and rangeland management.

Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program. The Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program is a voluntary program providing technical and financial assistance to implement non-point source pollution control measures for the protection and restoration of surface and ground water quality. Cost-share funds were allocated to 105 counties for implementation of their local Non-Point Source (NPS) Pollution Management Plans. In FY 2014, cost-share in the amount of \$1,500,842 was provided to landowners for the installation of 849 practices. Practices receiving the majority of the funds included abandoned water well plugging, remediation of failed on-site wastewater systems, and livestock water supplies.

Water Conservation Program. Since 2007 the Water Right Transition Assistance Program (WTAP) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) are DOC programs to address Kansas Water Plan water conservation initiatives through voluntary, incentive-based retirements of privately held water rights. The CREP program addresses critical hydrologic areas in 10 counties of the upper Arkansas River basin. In the CREP program, 31,965 acre-feet of annual water appropriation rights have been retired on 15,765 acres from 108 water rights. The DOC has provided a total of \$947,947 in cost-share contracts to landowners while the Farm Services Agency is providing approximately \$37 Million in 15 year CRP contract payments to landowners. The WTAP program targets high priority areas in the Rattlesnake Creek basin, the Prairie Dog Creek basin, and Groundwater Management District No. 4 in northwest Kansas. In the WTAP program, 6,634 acre-feet of annual water appropriation rights have been retired from 23 water rights at a total cost to the DOC of \$3,211,992.

Riparian and Wetland Program. The goal of the Riparian and Wetland Protection Program (RWPP) is to protect, enhance, and restore riparian areas, wetlands, and associated habitats by providing technical, educational, and financial assistance to landowners and the public in general. In FY 2014, \$170,362 was used to provide technical assistance for the installation and three years of maintenance of riparian forest buffers installed above streambank stabilization projects in Kansas. The technical assistance is provided through installation and maintenance contracts with the Kansas Forest Service. These funds are used to package with other initiatives in state priority areas of Delaware and Neosho River Basins.

Kansas Water Quality Buffer Initiative. The Kansas Water Quality Buffer Initiative provides state incentives to supplement federal incentives to encourage the establishment of vegetative filter strips and riparian forest buffers in state priority areas. These conservation practices protect riparian habitats, stream corridors and federal reservoir storage by providing water quality filters from adjacent agricultural activities. In FY 2014, 2253 payments to landowners totaling \$254,637 were made on 2197 buffer contracts. There are 13,702 acres are presently enrolled in the Water Quality Buffer Initiative.

Additional Division of Conservation Priorities and Targeted Areas:

- Implementation of streambank restoration projects in targeted watersheds above federal reservoirs with public water supply storage. The Delaware Streambank Restoration Project has installed 23 streambank stabilization projects saving 37,873 tons of sediment per year from entering Perry Reservoir. An additional 9 projects are planned to be completed saving 10,840 tons of sediment per year from entering Perry Reservoir.
- Target the Kansas Water Quality Buffer Initiative in high priority watersheds above federal reservoirs with public water supply. Change program to a one-time signing incentive payment to enhance participation.
- Fully fund Aid to Conservation Districts so there will adequate conservation district staff available in each county to help implement local, state, and federal cost-share programs. The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) allocation for FFY 2014 was \$18,144,584.

- Osage city has submitted a supplemental request for the Osage City Lake restoration project to increase the water storage capacity of Osage City Lake. Phase 1 – dredge 77,400 cubic yards for a cost of \$676,700. Phase 2 – dredge 33,705 cubic yards for a cost of \$321,500. Phase 3 – dredge 19,260 cubic yards for a cost of \$198,065.
- Work with our federal partners to provide targeted technical and financial assistance for the priorities in the Governor’s 50 Year Water Vision. Examples would include working with Farm Service Agency to develop a Water Quality Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program in Kansas. Another example is to work with NRCS on developing Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects to address water quantity and water quality issues in Kansas.
- Look at new technologies that could reduce irrigation water usage. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grants are an opportunity to test new irrigation technologies.

FY 2014 DOC State Water Plan Funds

