

Vision 2020 Committee
March 9, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of Vision 2020 Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding the Water Plan Fund. I am quite confident we would not be here discussing the Water Plan Fund if it were being funded at the levels and from the funding sources that were originally authorized in the late 1980s. That being said, it is difficult to discuss the funding of the Water Plan without discussing the plan itself, its philosophy and the rationale for the plan in the first place.

My personal perspective on the Water Plan spans the entire history of its funding from the late 1980s with my involvement on the Kansas Farm Board and Farm Bureau's involvement in the compromise of the funding sources to pass the legislation, 10 years in the legislature, 10 years lobbying for entities that used Water Plan funding or had interest in the state's natural resources to now being part of the administration of a natural resource agency.

It is not an exaggeration to say that water is the most important issue, as a developing society, we have to deal with. Water's importance to the very existence of life dictates the priority it should have in the discussions and decisions of governments at all levels. If we wait to take action until our citizens and constituents lives are negatively impacted, we have waited too long. The ramifications of inaction today may not be felt next year but it will be felt and it will jeopardize the lives and future of Kansas and Kansans. As our populations grow, become more centralized and society progresses, water planning becomes more important and decisions must be made well in advance.

Those discussions and planning are taking place, within the structure of the Water Plan and unilaterally within local, state, and federal agencies. In some cases the projects by local state or federal agencies that can be done are limited in scope, due to funding restrictions. The ad hoc projects of the various agencies are good and meritorious but alone have limited impact. With appropriate water plan funding, necessary landscape, statewide solutions and projects would be more easily accomplished. Additionally, without appropriate broad based funding, participation and confidence in the water planning process will suffer, making it difficult to get all stake holders at the table.

As an example of the impact of landscape scale projects, we only need to look at the surface water of Kansas compared to Kansas following World War II. Kansas had none of the Federal Reservoirs we enjoy today. While the primary impetus for the reservoirs was flood control, the impact has been much more far reaching. The additional benefits of water supply, recreational opportunities, and improved quality of life, have been critical to the population and economic growth of Kansas. If the population and economic growth of Kansas are going to continue, the quality and quantity of our man made and

naturally existing water resource will be just as important for future growth as they have been for the growth of the last 70 years. Given the age of our Kansas reservoirs and the development of our natural water resources, our greater concern may be sustainability of our economy and population rather than growth.

There are a number of public policy decisions that Kansas will make that influence population and economic growth. If we make all the right decisions as it relates to these other public policy decisions to grow our state, but fail to address the important issue of water, the other decisions will have been made in vain.

Mr. Chairman, you asked that we address three issues from the stand point of KDWPT. First, the Department's priorities for the state with regard to the Water Plan Fund; second, the timelines for the desired action; finally, any funding options for the Water Plan.

In past years, there has been some Water Plan funding used by the department but it has been relatively small and nothing on an ongoing basis. In the 1990's, Water Plan Funding was used for Cheyenne Bottoms. Most recently Water Plan funding was used to secure a minimum water level from the irrigation district at Keith Sebelius Reservoir. Therefore from the stand point of KDWPT, Water Plan funding is not an option we consider or have as a priority for the Department in our planning process.

The Department does do limited work on riparian areas on department land and significant wetland development. Both of these types of projects have far reaching affects and positive impacts on water issues. The various projects primary purpose is to benefit wildlife, but if part of a broader, well-funded plan would have significantly greater potential and impact on water quality and quantity.

As I mentioned earlier, decisions that need to be made concerning our water resource's impact on the Kansas economy and population growth cannot be made when the impact becomes obvious. If we wait that long it is too late. Like all other natural resource conservation issues, funding our water infrastructure needs is as high stakes as anything we do. To fail in that regard may not be recognized by us tomorrow, but that failure will certainly be recognized by future Kansans.

Obviously, the biggest challenge is not the plan itself. I would contend that planning is taking place. Our challenge is to implement the plan and have the funding to implement it. In the 1980's, I believe they had it right. The water users and those that impact our water resources should have a significant role. Additionally, there should be some broad based support. How we establish those proportions is the challenge and I am guessing, the meat of this committee hearing.

The question arises, can the various water users and those that impact water quality be identified and fairly assessed, giving Kansas a fair broad based funding plan without using a broad based funding source as the legislature did in the 80s. If looking only at users and those that impact water quality for the funding source becomes the plan, it is imperative that we separate consumptive users from "users." A case will be made that recreation uses water. Recreation is not a consumptive user of water or the primary purpose for which our reservoirs were built or operated. Recreation is a side benefit of our water resources that has no consumptive requirements while adding to the Kansas economy and quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for your tireless efforts to keep this issue before the legislature. It is of extreme importance to our state and a well-funded Water Plan is vital to the future of Kansas.