



To: Senate Natural Resources Committee
From: Kansas Natural Resources Council, Sharon Ashworth submitting.
Re: SB 269

Dear Committee members,

“Pole cat”, “Civet cat”; folk names for the Eastern spotted skunk, a once common denizen of the fields, woods, and farmsteads of Kansas. SB 269 removes this now rare species from the state Threatened and Endangered Species (T & E) list and the Kansas Natural Resource Council opposes this action.

1) The removal of the spotted skunk may hasten its decline, eradicating a piece of our native Kansas ecosystems and piece of Kansas history.

2) Like the red-bellied snake before it, the removal of the Eastern spotted skunk from the T & E list signals to Kansas citizens and businesses that the legislature is now taking up the duties and responsibilities of the KDWP.

The Skunk was a popular pelt animal from the days of settlement until the 1930s, tallying over 100,000 pelts sold annually. Trapping continued at increasingly lower rates until the 1970s and the KDWP closed the trapping season in 1977. Although secretive and not often seen, the spotted skunk was common on the small, diverse farms of Kansas’ early agricultural days. Farmers may have called the skunk a “varmint” as it fed on an occasional chicken as well as mice and grain, and denned in corncribs and fencerows. Such concerns are not relevant today given the trends in Kansas agriculture toward larger farms and the use of pesticides. Once present in all western Kansas counties and common in the rest of the state, the spotted skunk’s presence is now recorded in 34 counties with sightings of only 1 to 5 individuals in each county. Only 14 counties have the critical habitat to potentially support a population of spotted skunks.

SB 269 suggests the skunk may now be considered a different kind of varmint, one that stands to muddle plans where what little of its critical habitat remains – the edges of woods, riparian forests, and grasslands with rock outcrops or clumps of shrubs. While it may appear that T & E and critical habitat designations interfere with public and private development plans, we do have an agency tasked to review such plans and procedures in place for adjusting and amending any conflicts. The legislature of Kansas created the KDWP and staffed that agency with experts, yet seems determined to second-guess these experts and ignore codified procedures. Calling out species one by one is arbitrary and inefficient, not to mention bad policy and bad science.

References:

Nilz, S. K., and E. J. Finck. 2008. Proposed recovery plan for the eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*) in Kansas. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Pratt, KS. 51 pp.

Great Plains Nature Center: <http://gpnc.org/esskunk.htm>

Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

Learn more about Kansas Natural Resource Council at <http://knrc.weebly.com/>