

**Statement of Ron Klataske,
Executive Director, Audubon of Kansas
to the Kansas State Senate, Committee on Natural Resources
in Opposition to S.B. 269
March 12, 2015**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, we thank you for the opportunity to share the position of Audubon of Kansas and other conservation partners who have an ongoing concern regarding the need for conservation of imperiled wildlife species in Kansas.

Audubon of Kansas is an independent membership organization devoted to promoting the enjoyment, understanding, protection and restoration of natural ecosystems. We seek to establish a culture of conservation and an environmental ethic. In this capacity we work in partnership with other organizations and individuals representing thousands of people committed to conservation throughout the state and country.

With conservation of our state's wildlife heritage in mind, Audubon of Kansas opposes House Bill 269. It is designed to begin a process of eviscerating the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1975 one species at a time--or in this case by eliminating a listed species for political rather than science-based reasons.

Senate Bill 269 circumvents the scientific process that uses sighting data, literature searches, expert input, informational meetings, public comment periods, and KDWPT Commission voting on listing changes.

The state needs more—not fewer--ways to work in partnership with all stakeholders to protect the integrity of our state's ecosystems. Without early and effective conservation and management more of the currently state-listed threatened and endangered species, and other species in greatest need of conservation, will decline to the point where they may qualify as candidates warranted for listing as federally threatened and endangered species.

The Eastern Spotted Skunk *Spilogale putorius* is rare in Kansas, classified as *Threatened*. It is designated as a state *Endangered Species* in Missouri, where it has been declining drastically in recent decades. Although I remember two that we encountered on our farm in Washington County when I was a child, they appear to have become extinct in that county and most of Kansas in recent decades. In the 1920s and 1930s as many as 100,000 were trapped in the state and sold in the fur market; but that number dropped to one percent of that in the following three decades. In addition to habitat destruction, and factors unknown, it appears that this species disappeared from much of its inhabited range after the widespread use of pesticides, including DDT.

Skunks eat plant and animal foods in about equal amounts in fall and winter but take more animal matter during spring and summer when insects, their preferred food, are more available. They also eat small rodents, fruits and berries. Birds and their eggs are rarely eaten.

Spotted skunks utilize tallgrass prairie, brushy areas and wooded areas with heavy leaf cover. Rather than trying to use political pressure and legislative means to remove the Eastern Spotted Skunk from the Kansas Threatened Species list, it would be far more honorable for the Sedgwick County Commission to work in partnership with the KDWPT and other conservation partners to recover the species sufficiently so that it can be removed from the list of critically imperiled species.

In addition to protecting existing critical habitat, there are tremendous opportunities to improve and provide habitat for this species and many others ranging from Eastern Meadowlarks to Monarch Butterflies within thousands of acres of land managed as floodways in the Wichita area. This could be accomplished by simply reducing the frequency of mowing and better timing the mowing that is needed.

In recognition of the thousands of Wichita area residents of all ages who enthusiastically participate in activities at the Great Plains Nature Center, there is no doubt that proactive conservation measures such as outlined above will be endorsed by most of the public. This perspective is further supported by the fact that there have not been any onerous requirements for mitigation in the community to accommodate the habitat needs of this species.

The Eastern Spotted Skunk is rare in Kansas and also appears to be declining throughout much of its entire natural range—although not yet classified as threatened or endangered nationally. KDWPT lists such species for the following reasons:

- a) It is well-defined in the first statement of KDWPT's mission statement:

“To conserve and enhance Kansas’ natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats to ensure future generations the benefits of the state’s diverse, living resources.”

- b) Based on past actions and listing procedures:
The 1973 Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science (Conservation Committee) lists of fishes, amphibians and reptiles recognizing “Species endangered in Kansas but not nationally.”
- c) Based on recent scientific & ecological information that supports conservation efforts that occur on the periphery of a species range. If a population is in decline it tends to collapse toward the periphery of its range (Lomalino and Channell 1995).
- d) Peripheral populations are often genetically distinct and may be better adapted to changing climatic conditions and stress than the core population. (Quinn and Karr 1992).

- e) Based on Social Science and the opinions of Kansas Surveys of Kansans' attitudes towards threatened and endangered species reveal strong support of peripheral species protection in 1991 and 2011 opinion surveys: 1991 survey (Kansas State University) "Wildlife which are endangered in Kansas, but abundant in other states, should be protected" (Of those who had an opinion: 86% Kansans agreed/14% disagreed) 2011 survey (Responsive Management, Inc.) "that wildlife that is listed as threatened or endangered in Kansas yet abundant in other states should be protected." (Of those who had an opinion: 88% agreed/12% disagreed).

Literature cited and/or particularly relevant to this issue:

Layher, W. G., K. L. Brunson, J. Schaefer, M. D. Schwilling, and R. D. Wood. 1986. Summary of nongame task force actions relative to developing three species lists: Species in need of conservation, threatened, and endangered by 1986 nongame task force. Kansas Fish and Game Commission Report. 232pp.

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Platt, D. R. 1973. Rare, endangered and extirpated species in Kansas II. Amphibians and reptiles. Trans. Kansas Academy of Science. 76 (3):185-192.

Poresky, R. H. 1991. Survey of Kansans' attitudes regarding threatened and endangered wildlife. Kansas State University report to Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

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Responsive Management, Inc. 2011. Kansas resident's opinions on threatened and endangered wildlife and actions to protect wildlife. Report to Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.