

MINUTES OF THE SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mark Taddiken at 8:30 a.m. on February 25, 2009 in Room 545-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except:
Senator Steve Morris- excused

Committee staff present:
Raney Gilliland, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Corey Carnahan, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Jason Thompson, Revisor of Statutes Office
Kristen Kellems, Revisor of Statutes Office
Judy Seitz, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:
Greg Foley, Executive Director, State Conservation Commission (SCC)
Rod Vorhees, Chairman, SCC
Gene Albers, Board President, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD)
Harold Klaege, Retired conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Keri Harris, District Manager, Franklin County Conservation District
Don Paxson, District Supervisor, KACD
Connie Richmeier, District Manager, Finney County Conservation District
Wayne Lukert, Supervisor, Shawnee County Conservation District
Herbert Graves, Executive Director, State Association of Kansas Watersheds (SAKW)
Wendy Harms, Associate Director, Kansas Aggregate Producers' Association (KAPA)

Others attending:
See attached list.

Chairman Taddiken opened the hearing on **SB 231 - Transferring the powers and duties of the animal health department and state conservation commission to the department of agriculture**. He has received e-mails in support of **SB 231** because of the savings to the State.

Chairman Taddiken called the Committee's attention to a handout (Attachment 1) which shows the Legislative Post Audit summary of the estimated savings for the Animal Health Department (AHD) and State Conservation Commission (SCC) if merged with the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA), two pages comparing actual expenditures and expenditures that might be made through consolidation and the last page from the Department of Administration regarding the potential for rent savings for the SCC.

There was no one to testify in support of **SB 231**.

Greg Foley, Executive Director, SCC, appeared in opposition to **SB 231**. Mr. Foley said that he has appeared before the Committee to give an agency briefing and reviewed the Legislative Post Audit's report on merging the SCC into the KDA. He introduced Rod Vorhees and said he would be available for questions at the appropriate time.

Rod Vorhees, Chairman, SCC, presented testimony in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 2). He said this bill abolishes the SCC and reduces the role of the Commission from a decision making body to advisory. This system has been effective and assures that local districts have a strong voice in conservation program implementation. Mr. Vorhees said the SCC will utilize a piece of post audit's recommendation regarding the number of employees. Eight temporary positions are authorized for funding by half State Water Plan funds and half United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding and three of those positions are currently filled. The NRSC State Conservationist is willing to dissolve this agreement if it is beneficial to maintaining the locally led SCC. He also stated that the SCC alternative plan outlined will provide \$381,788 in savings if a 10% FY2010 State General Fund (SGF) reduction occurs and \$451,696 if the SGF reduction is at 18%.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Minutes of the Senate Agriculture Committee at 8:30 a.m. on February 25, 2009 in Room 545-N of the Capitol.

Gene Albers, Board President, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD), testified in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 3). He said the KACD has had a strong working relationship with the SCC which is responsible for administering Conservation District Law and assisting conservation districts with the management of state-funded cost-share programs. Mr. Albers said the possible cost savings of consolidating SCC with the KDA may not be sufficient to warrant the potential reduction of the specialized hands-on service to conservation and watershed districts that they currently receive.

Chairman Taddiken recognized Representative Larry Powell, Chairman, House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, who attended the meeting briefly.

Harold Klaege, Retired Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), appeared in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 4). He said that conservation has been a voluntary process and only works when local leaders show and lead others in protecting and preserving the natural resources in Kansas. Mr. Klaege stated that conservation is silently protecting the natural resources for the next generations.

Keri Harris, District Manager, Franklin County Conservation District, testified in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 5). She said this bill would have a drastic impact on conservation at the local level. The SCC provides personal and timely responses to questions and concerns directed to the conservation district employees and county supervisors.

Don Paxson, District Supervisor, KACD spoke in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 6). He said the SCC staff is well-trained and knows the importance of adapting to the needs of each particular region of the state. Mr Paxson told the Committee that before they choose to alter a conservation structure that has been in place and worked well for more than 70 years in order to partially address a temporary budget situation ,they should stop and think about the devastating effect this bill could have.

Connie Richmeier, District Manager, Finney County Conservation District, testified in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 7). She stated that the Conservation Districts could lose their ability to effectively deliver the conservation message due to other issues and programs that could become a priority of the Department of Agriculture. She also said the SCC has been a driving force in protecting natural resources and in keeping conservation strong in Kansas. Ms. Richmeier asked the question: "What is not working?" She offered to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Wayne Lukert, Supervisor, Shawnee County Conservation District spoke in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 8). He said the Kansas conservation districts and the SCC are non regulatory agencies by law. He is also concerned that the funding for conservation programs may be diverted to other priorities within any agency taking over the SCC. Mr. Lukert also said that reducing the SCC to a strictly advisory capacity would eliminate any grass roots input from the people of Kansas and that would place all final say of administration of funds in the hands of the secretary of the controlling agency. He stated that the Shawnee County Conservation District is concerned that to accomplish the consolidation of the SCC with any agency would require gutting the Kansas Conservation District Act. Mr. Lukert offered to stand for questions.

Herbert Graves, Executive Director, State Association of Kansas Watersheds (SAKW, testified in opposition to **SB 231** (Attachment 9). He said that discontinuing the close link that the SCC has with the Kansas Water Office (KWO) and the Kansas Water Authority (KWA) is troubling where the state water plan budgets are concerned. Mr. Graves also said that turning the Commissioners into an advisory board with no decision or administrative authority will spell the end to their existence. He offered to stand for questions.

Wendy Harms, Associate Director, Kansas Aggregate Producers' Association (KAPA), appeared as an opponent to **SB 231** (Attachment 10). She said that KAPA pays fees into the land mined reclamation program that the SCC administers and expressed concerns about the redirection of those funds

Senator Francisco had a question regarding the appointments to the Kansas Water Authority, the Animal Health Board and the State Conservation Commission Boards

CONTINUATION SHEET

Minutes of the Senate Agriculture Committee at 8:30 a.m. on February 25, 2009 in Room 545-N of the Capitol.

The following submitted written testimony opposing **SB 231**:

Ron Allen, Pawnee Watershed District, ([Attachment 11](#)).

Wayne Bossert, Manager, Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4 ([Attachment 12](#)).

Kelli Kramer, District Manager, Allen County Conservation District ([Attachment 13](#)).

Tom Frusher, Chairman, Ness County Conservation District Board of Supervisors ([Attachment 14](#)).

Clay County Conservation District ([Attachment 15](#)).

George Poland, Chairman, Geary County Conservation District ([Attachment 16](#)).

Jim Bennett, Chairperson, Lane County Conservation District ([Attachment 17](#)).

Ronald Brown, Vice President, KACD ([Attachment 18](#)).

Chairman Taddiken closed the hearing on **SB 231**.

Mr. Vorhees took questions from the Committee.

Mr. Foley took questions from the Committee.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 3, 2009.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE GUEST LIST

DATE: 2-25-09

NAME	REPRESENTING
Tom Meek	Clay Co. Conservation Dist.
Bob Shaw	" KACD "
Hab Gross	SARW
Pat Rehner	KACD
Gene Alberta	KACD
Ron Brown	KACD
Harold KAECK	Myself
Rod Vorhees	SCC
Sandra Fishburn	DCCD
Jim Wease	DCCD
Cheri Miller	WYCCD
Susan Garnett	LVCCD
Gina Thompson	Wilson CCD
W. C. Cottradio	KDA
SEAN MILLER	CAPITOL STRATEGIES
Randol Walker	Myself Myself
Wigh Keck	Hein law firm
George Teagarden	KAD
Mike Beam	KLA

Figure 1-2
Summary Table of Estimated Cost Savings
(In 2009 dollars)

Savings for the Animal Health Department				
Actions That Could Produce Savings	Salaries & Benefits	Rent	Other Savings	Total
Estimated Savings That Could Be Achieved Through Restructuring				
Eliminate agency head and deputy position; create 1 division director and 1 program manager position	\$48,045			\$48,045
Eliminate 1 mid-level position	\$42,153			\$42,153
Eliminate 6 support positions: 1 fiscal and 5 clerical	\$241,913			\$241,913
Rent reduction: moving central office staff to the Dept. of Agriculture-Mills Building		\$53,903		\$53,903
Direct equipment savings from position eliminations			\$2,471	\$2,471
Other savings from a single, larger agency			\$1,871	\$1,871
Total savings for the Animal Health Department	\$332,111	\$53,903	\$4,342	\$390,356
Savings for the State Conservation Commission				
Actions That Could Produce Savings	Salaries & Benefits	Rent	Other Savings	Total
Estimated Savings That Could Be Achieved Through Restructuring				
Eliminate agency head and deputy position; create 1 division director position	\$113,932			\$113,932
Eliminate 1 mid-level position (a)	\$0			\$0
Eliminate 3 support positions: 2 fiscal and 1 clerical support	\$184,514			\$184,514
Rent reduction: leasing less office space for the reduced number of staff		\$19,050		\$19,050
Direct equipment savings from position eliminations			\$1,580	\$1,580
Other savings from a single, larger agency			\$955	\$955
Total savings for the Conservation Commission	\$298,446	\$19,050	\$2,535	\$320,031
Grand Total for Estimated Savings	\$630,557	\$72,953	\$6,877	\$710,387
Percent of Total	89%	10%	1%	100%
Estimated Savings That Could Be Achieved Through Operational Efficiencies (with or without restructuring)				
Reducing Animal Health Department's office space to rental space standards (b)		\$989		\$989
Reducing Conservation Commission's office space to rental space standards (b)		\$4,825		\$4,825
Total Savings for Both Agencies		\$5,814		\$5,814
(a) This position has been vacant and unfunded for more than one year, so no immediate cost savings are realized.				
(b) These rent savings could be achieved with or without consolidation by reducing the amount of office space that's leased currently to the square footage standard established by the Kansas Department of Administration. This amount is included in the \$72,953 estimated rent savings shown above.				
Source: LPA analysis of operating costs.				

this one

1-2

Analysis of Kansas Conservation Commission Expenditures for FY 2008						
Comparing Actual Expenditures and Expenditures That Might Be Made through Consolidation						
Description	What Was		What Might Be through Consolidation		Comments	Difference in Funding Levels
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent		
Total expenditures for FY 2008	\$16,965,384		\$16,965,384			
Less amount estimated to be saved through consolidation (as shown in the audit report)	N/A		-\$320,031			
subtotal	\$16,965,384		\$16,645,353			
Fee Funds	\$127,547	0.8%	\$127,547	0.8%	Assume no change in the amount of fees collected by the Department.	
Federal Funds	\$563,437	3.3%	\$563,437	3.4%	Assume no change in the amount of federal funds received by the Commission.	
State Water Plan Fund	\$15,173,035	89.4%	\$15,173,035	91.2%	Assume no change in the amount of Water Plan funds allocated to the Commission.	
Buffer Participation Incentive grants & transfer from Wildlife Fee Fund of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks	\$150,000	0.9%	\$150,000	0.9%	Assume no change in the amount of funds transferred to the Commission.	
State General Fund	\$951,365	5.6%	\$631,334	3.8%	Amount of SGF funding needed to cover remaining costs. The positions that were identified in the model as being eliminated were paid using State General Fund moneys.	-\$320,031
Total funding sources	\$16,965,384	100.0%	\$16,645,353	100.0%		-\$320,031

Post Audit

1-27-09

3-1

Analysis of Animal Health Department Expenditures for FY 2008						
Comparing Actual Expenditures and Expenditures That Might Be Made through Consolidation						
Description	What Was		What Might Be through Consolidation		Comments	Difference in Funding Levels
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent		
Total expenditures for FY 2008	\$3,177,498		\$3,177,498			
Less amount estimated to be saved through consolidation (as shown in the audit report)	N/A		-\$390,356			
subtotal	\$3,177,498		\$2,787,142			
Fee Funds	\$1,492,161	47.0%	\$1,492,161	53.5%	Assume no change in the amount of fees collected by the Department	\$0
Federal Funds	\$731,860	23.0%	\$686,860	24.6%	Assume \$45,000 of expenses covered by federal funds are eliminated through the reduction of Emergency Management Specialist position. (Note: The Department of Agriculture could apply for these federal funds, and might be able to get its emergency management position funded using them. Right now, that position is funded using fee funds.)	-\$45,000
State General Fund	\$953,477	30.0%	\$608,121	21.8%	Amount of SGF funding needed to cover remaining costs.	-\$345,356
Total funding sources	\$3,177,498	100.0%	\$2,787,142	100.0%		-\$390,356

Conservation Commission

109 SW 9th Suite 500 (Mills Building)

Lease Begin Date: 7/1/1999

Lease End Date: 6/30/2014

Office Lease

4068 sq. ft at \$11.38 Rate increases to \$11.63 on 6/30/2009

Utilities add \$1.87 sq. ft in FY 2008

Storage Lease

294 sq. ft at \$2.50

Termination for Fiscal Necessity

Notwithstanding any other provision of this lease, if funds anticipated for the continued fulfillment of this lease agreement are at any time not forthcoming, either through failure of the legislature to appropriate funds specifically budgeted for this lease or the discontinuance or material alteration of the program under which funds have been provided, then second party shall have the right to terminate this lease by giving the First Party a reasonable notice specifying the reasons for such termination. The termination of the lease pursuant to this paragraph shall not cause penalty to be charged to the state agency. Any prepaid rent shall be returned to Second Party for the period following the termination date.

Sublet

The leased space can be sublet to any other state agency at the current rate for a same or comparable purpose.

**Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 231 to Consolidate
the
Department of Animal Health and the State Conservation Commission
Into the
Kansas Department of Agriculture
Presented to the
Senate Agriculture Committee
by
Rod Vorhees, Chairman
State Conservation Commission**

February 25, 2009

Chairman Taddiken and members of the Committee, I am Rod Vorhees, Chairman of the State Conservation Commission, and on behalf of the State Conservation Commission (SCC), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony opposing Senate Bill 231. The Legislative Post Audit (LPA) Performance Report completed last fall recommended merging the SCC into the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA). During my 21 year service as a volunteer conservation district supervisor and 15 years of those years as a commissioner, I have worked hard to strengthen the role conservation districts and the SCC play in protecting Kansas natural resources. As a farmer, stockman, businessman and taxpayer I believe that the proposed changes to the SCC in SB 231 are unnecessary and will weaken the ability of conservation districts and the SCC to continue the 71 year tradition of locally led conservation in Kansas.

The proposed bill abolishes the State Conservation Commission and reduces the role of the Commission from a decision making body to advisory. The 525 locally elected supervisors select five members of the nine-member SCC board from their own ranks. These board members have a thorough knowledge of conservation and the natural resource protection needs of the state. This system has been effective and assures that local districts have a strong voice in conservation program implementation. If consolidation were to occur, conservation districts' input, influence and voice in conservation will be marginalized.

The SCC has always taken great pride in maintaining an efficient small staff that utilizes technology and other cost saving methods. The agency implements a \$15 million annual budget of financial assistance funds with a total staff of 22 employees. In addition, eight of the 22 positions are temporary positions, jointly funded by federal funds, and 14 are program staff in the State office. One of the 14 state office positions is vacant and has been for several years. **All program management and implementation occurs as a function of 13 employees.** The SCC respectfully requests that the Legislature place value in current program effectiveness. The SCC does not believe that the audit addresses the reduced effectiveness that would occur with a consolidation. Although the LPA report suggests that functions of the SCC can be absorbed cutting four of the 13 positions, the SCC challenges that program effectiveness would suffer. Due to the limited scope of the audit, and the significant impact on program implementation that may occur, the SCC respectfully disagrees with the recommendations.

Since the audit was conducted a significant downturn in the economy has forced the administration and Legislature to reduce funding for the current year and it appears inevitable that a much greater reduction will be required to balance FY 2010. The Senate Ways and Means Committee has directed agencies to present a FY 2010 Budget that shows two alternatives for funding, a 10% reduction from the FY 2009 Governor's recommendation and a second proposal that would require an additional 3 to 8%. I have provided this to show that true SGF savings will occur without consolidation. The SCC has respectfully reviewed the audit and will utilize a piece of the recommendation and implement an additional strategy that will reduce eight temporary full-time positions. The reorganization plan will require a layoff of one current SGF employee and three temporary full time positions. Eight temporary positions are authorized for funding, by half State Water Plan funds and half USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding, and three of those positions are currently filled,. Staff has had discussions with the NRCS State Conservationist about the reorganization opportunities that could be made that affect our jointly funded contract employees. The NRSC State Conservationist is willing to dissolve this agreement if it is beneficial to maintaining the locally led SCC. In addition, he pledged to do what he could to find openings for the three remaining employees to prevent them from becoming jobless. This proposal has the potential to leave only one FTE jobless while achieving SGF and SWP fund savings. In addition, the SCC has a plan to reassess the organizational chart again in FY 2010. The SCC has one staff member that is planning to retire sometime in FY 2010. We offer this detailed administrative vision to illustrate the agency's continued commitment to be as efficient as possible. The following table will illustrate the amount of SGF and SWP reductions:

	FY 2009 Agency Request	FY 2009 Legislative Rescission Bill	FY 2009 Legislative Reduction	FY 2010 Reduction at 10%	FY 2010 Reduction at 18%	Total potential reduction compared to Post-Audit rec's
Administration - SGF	\$ 912,258	\$ 873,525	\$ 38,733	\$ 87,386	\$ 157,294	\$ 195,696
NRCS Contract Employees SWP authorized spending	\$ 256,000	not affected	not affected	-----	-----	\$ 256,000
		If a 18% FY2010 reduction occurs, Total Potential Savings =				\$ 451,696
		If a 10% FY2010 reduction occurs, Total Potential Savings =				\$ 381,788

The State Water Plan savings would be redirected locally in the Water Resources Cost-Share Program for individual landowner conservation projects.

Note: The above reductions are reductions from the beginning amounts that the Legislative Post Audit used to derive their proposed savings of \$320,031. I believe that this is a "true apples for apples" comparison. **The SCC alternative plan outlined above will provide \$381,788 in savings if a 10% FY 2010 SGF reduction occurs and \$451,696 if the SGF reduction is at 18%.**

In conclusion, I believe that SB 231 is the most serious threat to locally led conservation in the 71 year history of conservation districts. This bill has the potential to impact not only the efficient delivery of state cost-share programs to Kansans but the future of conservation districts. Any proposal that consolidates the SCC into the KDA is an extreme action that is not justified. The potential savings outlined in the performance audit can be accomplished without consolidation as presented.

Chairman Taddiken, and members of the committee on behalf of the State Conservation Commission I respectfully request the committee oppose SB 231. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before your committee today. I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Respectfully,

Rodney Vorhees, by gdf

Rodney Vorhees, Chairman



Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Representing Local Conservation Districts

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
by Gene Albers, Board President
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Gene Albers, Board President of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts. I am here in opposition to SB 231.

KACD is a voluntary, nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that was established in 1944, seven years after the State Conservation Commission was statutorily created in 1937. Our members are the conservation districts located in the state's 105 counties. Our purpose is to provide them with education and information about best conservation practices and to advocate for resources directed at conservation programs.

Since the time KACD was formed, we have had a strong working relationship with the SCC, which is responsible for administering Conservation District Law and assisting conservation districts with the management of state-funded cost-share programs. SCC's staff is a group of highly trained individuals who provide hands-on assistance and give needed technical and program support to county supervisors who serve in a volunteer capacity.

The conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources has been a priority in Kansas for more than 70 years. We've been successful because of the key partnerships between local, state, and federal organizations that exist solely to ensure that the state's resources are treated with care and that landowners embrace their role as committed stewards. It's a tradition we're proud of, and it's a system that works extraordinarily well.

We recognize that, just as KACD, SCC, and other conservation organizations have a duty to help preserve the state's natural resources, the Kansas Legislature has a duty to make sure taxpayer money is spent wisely and that cost savings are realized wherever possible. But the possible cost savings of consolidating SCC with the Kansas Department of Agriculture may not be sufficient to warrant the potential reduction of the specialized hands-on service to conservation and watershed districts that they rely on. Nor are the savings sufficient to warrant the lessening of the local control that has characterized the administration of conservation programming in Kansas for more than seven decades.

I urge you NOT to support SB 231. Thank you.

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 3*

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By Harold L. Klaege
Retired State Conservationist, NRCS
SB 231
February 25, 2009

My name is Harold L. Klaege, 410 Pine Ridge Drive Salina, KS. I am the former State Conservationists for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and am representing myself here today. I have been working in conservation over 38 years in four different states as an employee of the NRCS and now with a non-profit conservation organization in Kansas for the last year.

Addressing conservation in Kansas and other states has been a partnership with three entities, NRCS, Conservation Districts and State Conservation Commission. This is like the old three legged milk stool and the State Conservation Commission is one of those legs. This partnership has been working on conservation in Kansas since the formation of the conservation district law by you in 1937, which also formed the Conservation Commission to assist in development of the conservation district and provide coordination.

As State Conservationists, implementing the conservation provisions of the Farm Bills is based on the premise, locally led, and in Kansas we have and excellent local and state leadership. The conservation districts work hand in hand with the local NRCS personnel in "Helping People Help the Land". Conservation has been a voluntary process and only works when local leaders show and lead others in protecting and preserving the natural resources on Kansas.

When I worked in Nebraska, their State Conservation Commission was consolidated into their Department of Water Resources to become a new Department of Natural Resources. They still addressed conservation, but many times the focus and priorities were not on conservation, but changed as political issues developed. NRCS lost part of their partnership in helping coordinate with the local leadership.

I know what it is like to manage reduced budgets and trying to save money. As State Conservationists, I had to come up with a plan for Kansas. You may remember the plan to close 22 offices. My plan was to cut "brick and motor" and not those that are working with local

leadership on addressing conservation. Working with the partnership, I only closed 9 offices, and I can tell you that through the leadership and support of the Staff of the SCC and Conservation Districts, we developed an efficient delivery system.

With the “New Alternative Energies” emerging in Kansas today, the protection of our Natural Resources is becoming more crucial. Cellulosic Ethanol and the use of crop stover will decrease the organic matter of the soils and increase the potential erosion. It will also require the use of more fertilizer which will increase the potential for nutrient loading in the streams. Increased production of Corn in the Eastern Corn Belt has increased the Nitrogen Runoff and the Dead Zone of the Gulf was over 8,000 square miles 2008.

Wind turbines will have an effect of wildlife and can cause issues with erosion is not placed properly. The increase in sedimentation in our federal reservoirs is impacting Kansas today and will increase in the future.

Who will help coordinate and guide the locally led conservation districts in the future? The State Conservation Commission with their five commissioners’ from the conservation districts bring insight to the issues on promoting sound conservation in their local areas. Plans can be developed from the top down, but you need local leadership and buy-in to get in on the ground and proposed “advisors” can be blown off and ignored.

The proposed combination – what affect will it have implementing conservation of KANSAS Natural resources or a cut in needed support for those local entities getting conservation on the ground.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to present my comments on this bill and remember that conservation is silently protecting our natural resources for the next generations to come. WE have come a long way since the dust bowls and can we afford to let our guard down?

I urge you NOT to support SB 231. Thank You.

4-2

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
by Keri Harris
District Manager, Franklin County Conservation District
Secretary, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Employees Organization
SB 231
February 25, 2009

Chairman Taddiken and members of the committee, I am Keri Harris, District Manager for the Franklin County Conservation District and secretary for the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Employees Organization. I am here to give testimony in SB231, which proposes to abolish the State Conservation Commission and create a Conservation Division under the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

In January 2007 I provided testimony to both the House and Senate Ag Committees asking for support of HB 2048 to increase state aid to conservation districts. During those hearings the comment was made by one committee member "*I don't know of any agency where the State gets a bigger bang for our buck than conservation.*" So today I stand before you and again ask that you support conservation by considering the unanticipated consequences to such a beneficial program if SB 231 were to become law. The partnership which exists between the State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Kansas' 105 county conservation districts is one with 70 years of proven success. Creating a Conservation Division under the Department of Agriculture could jeopardize the success of the program delivery currently implemented through this partnership.

The elimination and restructuring of staff positions as proposed in SB 231 would create major concerns for conservation district employees, county supervisors and thousands of Kansas residents who rely on the technical and professional support provided by SCC. SCC staff members provide one-on-one assistance to conservation districts for program implementation training and administration of Conservation Law. SCC provides personal and timely responses to questions and concerns directed to them from 220 conservation district employees and 525 county supervisors. This personal assistance and dedication allows conservation districts to administer programs locally without additional expense to the State. Would the creation of a Conservation Division within the Kansas Department of Agriculture allow for the continuation of such success in the conservation field? Or would the restructuring merely create a greater cost for the conservation of our natural resources? The availability and accessibility of SCC staff to assist local districts with implementing conservation is a key to the *bang for the buck* impact conservation has in Kansas.

Senate Bill 231 was written to restructure the State Conservation Commission; however the unforeseen outcomes of SB 231 would have drastic impact on conservation at the local level. Conservation starts at the grass roots and Kansas has a great system in place to demonstrate such leadership. The nine-member SCC Board is the first step in a locally lead, grass roots conservation effort. Five of the SCC Board members remain directly involved with programs at the local level by continuing to serve as members of their home county's Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Losing the policy-making aspect of the SCC Board as proposed in SB 231 would be the first step towards the loss of local participation in conservation leadership.

Future generations can not afford for us to make a reduction today that will affect soil loss, water quality and water quantity for tomorrow. Even in the most difficult economic times the conservation of our natural resources should not be jeopardized during spending reductions. Budgets can be cut and restored over time as laws are signed, but our natural resources can not be replenished with the stroke of a pen. I believe any budget savings for the State will be overshadowed by environmental impacts and hidden costs to the residents of Kansas if SB 231 becomes law and for that reason I would ask you to support conservation by opposing SB 231. Thank you.

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 5



Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Representing Local Conservation Districts

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
by Don Paxson, District Supervisor
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Don Paxson, and I am chairman of the Board of Supervisors in the Graham County Conservation District. I am here in opposition to SB 231.

During the 30-plus years I have served on the Graham County Conservation District board, I have seen firsthand the way our county and other Kansas counties have benefited from the vital technical assistance provided by the State Conservation Commission. The SCC staff is well-trained and knows the importance of adapting to the needs of each particular region of the state. We all understand how those needs can vary between, say, Thomas County and Wyandotte County.

As a long-term supervisor, I have applauded the conservation structure in Kansas because I know that regardless of where we live, whether in a rural district or an urban one, we have a voice. We choose who represents us on the State Conservation Commission, which means that governance is from the bottom up, not the top down. Those who serve on the governing board know conservation – otherwise, they aren't chosen to serve.

We all understand that our state faces serious budget challenges. But before you choose to alter a conservation structure that's been in place and worked well for more than 70 years in order to partially address a temporary budget situation facing us, I urge you to stop and think about the devastating effect that Senate Bill 231 could have.

Consolidating the SCC with the Kansas Department of Agriculture does not make good sense. It threatens to take away the local voice that has been an important part of Kansas conservation.

I ask you to vote no on SB 231. Let's keep in place the structure that has worked well for all these years.

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 6*

**Testimony to the Senate Ag Committee
By Connie E. Richmeier
Finney County Conservation District
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

Chairman Taddiken and members of the committee. I am Connie Richmeier, District Manger for the Finney County Conservation District. I also serve as a representative of the Kansas Association of Conservation District Employees Organization and the President for the National Conservation District Employee Association.

I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 231 and ask that you also oppose this bill. I know you have heard a number of people testify against the bill; however, I would like for you to consider the local aspects of its passage.

The State Conservation Commission has played an important role in being a voice for locally led conservation and protecting our natural resources. The local, grassroots voice of the conservation districts would be affected by moving the State Conservation Commission under the Dept of Ag. This local voice for conservation issues could cease to exist. We could lose our ability to effectively deliver the conservation message due to other issues and programs that could become a priority of the Department of Ag. The local conservation voice has always been strong in advocating for local conservation needs that vary across the state due to the difference in soils types, water quality, wind, farming and urban practices. One would ask if this is an attempt to control the local voice.

The State Conservation Commission has been a driving force in protecting natural resources and in keeping conservation strong in Kansas, so in closing, I would like to ask you one question: What is not working?

Our State Conservation Commission has been successful in delivering programs across the state using the local delivery system. They have been effective in finding avenues to reduce spending while keeping the delivery system strong and in place. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 231.

Thank you and I will be glad to answer any questions.

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 7*

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By Wayne Lukert, Supervisor
Shawnee County Conservation District
SB 231
February 25, 2009

My name is Wayne Lukert and I serve on the board of supervisors for the Shawnee County Conservation District. I thank this committee for the time allowed me to speak in opposition to Senate Bill 231.

The Kansas Conservation District Act, or District Law, is a property protection law. It is a land use law. It is not an agriculture law. Granted, the largest land use in Kansas is agriculture. This does not negate the fact that District Law is for all types of land use in Kansas and not exclusive to one type of land use.

Most of Shawnee County Conservation District's time and energies are spent on natural resource conservation efforts and education in non-agricultural areas. We do plat reviews for our county. We work closely with our county to assist them with implementing the Federal Clean Water Act. We have an excellent working relationship with our county health department in implementing the Non Point Source Pollution program and Local Environmental Protection Plan. We sponsor and conduct sediment and erosion control workshops for contractors and developers to keep up their professional certification hours as well as educate them on best management practices for controlling storm water runoff from construction sites as well as educating them on how to comply with local environmental ordinances and resolutions. These are just a few of the non-agriculture related areas that we work in.

By law, Kansas conservation districts and the State Conservation Commission are non regulatory agencies. All programs administered through the State Conservation Commission and conservation districts are voluntary. Consolidating the State Conservation Commission with any agency with regulatory authority jeopardizes this concept. It could put conservation districts in a position of ratting people out to regulators for trying to voluntarily address a natural resource concern. It would break a trust the public has with conservation districts that has served this state well for over 70 years. Regulation may be necessary, but regulation and only regulation and compliance with regulations promotes only doing what is necessary to get by. It does not encourage anyone to do more.

Our conservation district is deeply concerned about funding for conservation. Will funding for conservation programs be diverted to other priorities within any agency taking over the State Conservation Commission? Will the funding for conservation district operations that the Kansas legislature recently increased, and then be taken from conservation districts to be used for other purposes?

Kansas District Law provides for the election of 5 supervisors by the qualified electors in each conservation district to implement District Law in each of the 105 conservation districts in Kansas. These supervisors serve without pay. The supervisors of each conservation district elect 5 of the commissioners of the 9 member State Conservation Commission. The commissioners set guidelines for administering all the programs under their jurisdiction. Reducing the State Conservation Commission to a strictly advisory capacity would eliminate any grass roots input from the people of Kansas. It would place all final say of administration in the hands of the secretary of the controlling agency. Cost share programs could be not necessarily used by who actually qualifies under the guidelines, but by who has the most political clout.

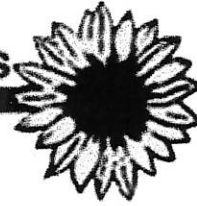
Our conservation district is concerned that to accomplish consolidation of the State Conservation Commission with any agency would require gutting the Kansas Conservation District Act. It would disenfranchise all of the people of Kansas by eliminating their voice through their conservation districts in determining their natural resource conservation needs, as specified under District Law. It would be a kick in the teeth to every person who has ever served a conservation district in this state to promote natural resource conservation.

Please, do not support Senate Bill 231.

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 8



**STATE ASSOCIATION
OF KANSAS WATERSHEDS**



Chairman Taddiken and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, I am Herbert R. Graves Jr., Executive Director of the State Association of Kansas Watersheds (SAKW). SAKW represents the 85 watershed districts in Kansas.

SAKW opposes consolidating the State Conservation Commission (SCC) into the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) as Senate Bill 231 is attempting to do.

The SCC has for over 70 years been the key element in making Kansas second to no other state in natural resource protection efforts. Rural Kansas has been served very well by the SCC through efficient use of state revenues showing maximum results with minimum administrative overhead.

Conservation and watershed districts are great examples of what locally led efforts can produce. This was only made possible through the excellent guidance provided by the SCC staff. It is widely felt; dismantling the SCC and having it reappear as a division of KDA will result in less direct hands-on assistance and more of a regulatory approach to the state's conservation effort.

Discontinuing the close link that the SCC has with the Kansas Water Office (KWO) and the Kansas Water Authority (KWA) especially where state water plan budgets are concerned is troubling to say the least. I am not totally sure, but it sounds like the Ex Officio position for the SCC Executive Director on the KWA might be abolished as a result of the consolidation.

I can definitely say the Kansas Association of Conservation District (KACD) and the State Association of Kansas Watersheds (SAKW) position on the KWA will be much less affective if the SCC, as we know it today, goes away.

The SCC board of elected Commissioners functions very well as an administrative authority for SCC programs and staff. Conservation and watershed districts depend on prompt and direct actions by the Commissioners. Turning the Commissioners into an advisory board with no decision or administrative authority will in essence spell the end to their existence. Elected servants from conservation districts across the state expect more than is being provided by SB231.

In summary, SB231 attempts to fix what is not broke. Audits are necessary to assure us all that government remains as efficient as possible and that each tax dollar we send to Topeka is spent wisely, but in the case of the SCC consolidation into KDA this post audit missed the mark.

Mr. Chairman, SAKW thanks you and the Agriculture Committee for the opportunity to present our testimony in opposing SB231.

Herbert R. Graves Jr.
SAKW Executive Director

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 9

KAPA

Kansas Aggregate
Producers' Association

Edward R. Moses
Managing Director

TESTIMONY

Date: February 25, 2009

By: Wendy M. Harms, Associate Director

Regarding: SB 231 – An act concerning state agencies; abolishing the Kansas animal health department; creating the animal health division within the Kansas department of agriculture; transferring the powers, duties and functions of the livestock commissioner and the Kansas animal health department; abolishing the state conservation commission; creating the conservation division within the department of agriculture; transferring the powers, duties and functions of the executive director of the state conservation commission and the state conservation commission.

Before: Senate Agriculture Committee

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Wendy Harms, Associate Director of the Kansas Aggregate Producers Association. The Kansas Aggregate Producers Association (KAPA) is an industry wide trade association comprised of over 170 members located or conducting operations in all 165 legislative districts in this state, providing basic building materials to all Kansans. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with written testimony in opposition to SB 231. While our industry does not deal with the Kansas Animal Health Department, we do work very closely with the State Conservation Commission (SCC) and are providing comments in that regard.

When an aggregate producer locates a reserve which they wish to develop as a mining site, there are several hurdles which we must jump through as well as the cumbersome paperwork trail that is necessary for us to be in compliance with local, state and federal laws. The SCC is one of those agencies which we need to work with; we need to the necessary paperwork and pay the necessary fees into the reclamation program which was established in 1994 pursuant to K.S.A. 49-601. This program is totally fee funded and paid by our producers. While the fees may not be considered substantial (estimated yearly \$139,697), we would disagree. This program has been highly effective and has one of the highest compliance rates in the nation. Since its inception, our membership has taken great pride in our reclamation efforts. In fact, we have partnered with the SCC on the creation of the "Governor's Mined Land Reclamation Award" program which was created several years ago, that recognizes producers for their reclamation efforts. Since the establishment of the awards program, two of our members that have achieved national awards as well. Our producers take great pride in the agency and its programs. If a

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 10*

consolidation occurs, we are concerned that our funds could and may be redirected to other programs which might not benefit our producers.

In our opinion, because the SCC has been an independent stand alone agency, it has the firmness and flexibility to run its programs effectively and efficiently. We are highly interested in maintaining the commission and its program. We believe in order to maintain this quality of service, it is vital that the SCC remain independent.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on this issue. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 235-1188.

PAWNEE WATERSHED JOINT DISTRICT NO. 81

**514 W. Highway 156 Jetmore, Kansas 67854
620-357-6420 e-mail:horsethiefres@hotmail.com**

Testimony—SB 231

Chairman Taddiken and members of the Committee:

I'm Ron Allen, representing the Pawnee Watershed District. I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony in opposition to SB 231.

At the risk of using an overworked cliché, I'm afraid that SB 231 is an attempt to fix something that isn't broken. Since its creation in 1937, the Conservation Commission has provided leadership in putting projects on the ground that protect our natural resources— projects ranging from the building of terraces and waterways to the construction of watershed dams to the plugging of abandoned wells. Every county in Kansas has benefited from these efforts.

The close ties between the Commission and local watershed and conservation districts must be kept intact. **Their relationship is a prime example of an organization driven from the bottom up.** The relegating of the board of directors of the Commission to an advisory role is simply the wrong approach. Who better can be found to make sound decisions regarding the preservation of our state's soil and water resources?

I am also concerned that the joining of a department whose responsibilities are primarily regulatory with an agency responsible for administering conservation projects will lead to conflict. Unfortunately, in times of limited funding, regulatory functions dictated by statute could take precedence over the funding of necessary conservation projects.

Although my experience here in the Capitol is limited, I have repeatedly observed the Legislature's recognition of the valuable contribution made by the Conservation Commission in the state's efforts to protect our environment. **That support should be maintained through Legislative interaction with an independent agency.**

The Pawnee Watershed District was formed to construct flood control dams. Before any structure enters final design, a benefit to cost ratio is required to determine whether construction moves forward. Simply put, **benefits derived must exceed costs incurred.**

Even though the short term savings from merger make the Conservation Commission an easy target, the long-term costs dictate that the status quo must be maintained.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this hearing.

Ron Allen
Manager, Pawnee Watershed District
Jetmore, KS

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 11*

Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4

Testimony for Senate Agriculture Committee

RE: SB 231

February 25, 2009

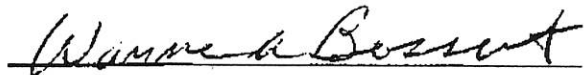
PO Box 905, Colby, Kansas 67701-0905 (785) 462-3915 Fax:(785) 462-2693 E-mail: wab@gmd4.org

POSITION: SB 231

Based on our listed concerns, GMD 4 opposes the consolidation of the State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture as proposed in SB 231.

GMD 4 CONCERNS:

1. The cost savings projected as a result of this consolidation are minimal – if any at all – and blending an efficient, small agency into a much larger agency is in our opinion a loss of program response and efficiency – therefore representing at best a true tradeoff in direct services rendered to the public.
2. GMD 4 has worked on and off with SCC on a number of programs in the past and appreciate their small nature and efficiency. In most cases we have had director responses within hours of our requests.
3. While GMD 4 has also worked with the Department of Agriculture many times in the past, and have been serviced sufficiently well by this agency, there are a few more management layers to get through – generally taking a longer time to accomplish what it is the district needs.
4. In closing, while GMD 4 has been successful working with both agencies in the past, we appreciate and would prefer the more efficient nature of the smaller, highly responsive SCC.



Signed: Wayne A. Bossert, GMD 4 Manager

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 12

**Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By Kelli Kramer, District Manager
Allen County Conservation District
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. First, know that I appreciate that work that all of you do, and I feel that the state of Kansas is well represented. I oppose SB 231.

One of the main goals of Senate Bill 231 is to abolish the State Conservation Commission. This commission is the state force behind conservation districts in the state of Kansas. There is a conservation district in every county in Kansas and each of them is the local distributor of cost share to producers in their respective county. The State Conservation Commission gets funds from the Kansas Water Plan Fund and uses the funds for a variety of functions. This includes cost share on a county basis, the repairs of a reservoir, retiring irrigation rights in southern Kansas to protect water quantity or to give Allen County money to install terraces. If you abolish the State Conservation Commission by joining it with the Department of Agriculture, then the funds that we currently have will be pooled with countless others, and conservation in the state of Kansas could potentially be harmed. The commission was started as a result of the Dust Bowl of the 1930's, and has since evolved into what it is today, which is protecting water in Kansas. Great strides have been made in our state concerning farming practices, and it is a direct result of what conservation districts have done. The commission performs a vital function by using those funds to make sure that they are used where necessary, and it is vitally important that we keep going in the direction we are going.

I am sure that this consolidation looks good on paper, and seems like such a good idea in theory, but keep in mind what the actual impact will be. You would be taking a division of government that is actually run by your constituents on the grass roots level, and combining it into a large agency where it will be one of many. It takes a group that provides a specific function to people of Kansas, and lumps in with a bunch of others.

I urge you to take the time and realize exactly what consolidating the State Conservation Commission into the Kansas Department of Agriculture will do to the farmers in your home counties. Thank you for taking the time to read what my opinion is, and if you have any questions, I will be happy to talk with you. My contact information is below, or you can email me at this address.

Thank you,

Kelli Kramer
202 W Miller Rd
Iola, KS 66749
620-365-2901 x3

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 13*

**Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By the Ness County Conservation District Board of Supervisors
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

Chairman Taddiken and members of the committee, after review of the Performance Audit Report to combine the State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture the Ness County Conservation District board of supervisors feels this would not be in the SCC and conservation districts' best interest and we oppose SB 231.

Our number one concern is loosing our influence at the grassroots level. The conservation district works one on one with local landowners and producers to put conservation on the ground. Our programs are voluntary and housing the SCC with KDA, a regulatory agency, would create a negative response from our producers.

The SCC provides excellent guidance and assistance to the districts to insure our mission is accomplished. Another concern is the funding our district receives from the SCC through grants and partnerships. The state cost share, aide to conservation districts and buffer grant programs are valuable assets in Ness County. Our landowners rely on the state cost share programs to install conservation practices to maintain healthy and productive land. If these programs are administered through other regulatory agencies and the funds used to cover other agency costs instead of putting conservation the ground, the incentive for producers to apply for cost share programs would be detrimental.

The Ness County Conservation District would appreciate your consideration of these items and not support SB 231.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Tom Frusher, Chairman
Board of Supervisors;
Tod Ryersee, Vice Chairman
Lawrence Wlerman, Treasurer
Mark Kerr, Member
Brent Schreiber, Member

*Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 14*



Clay County Conservation District

610 Fifth Street
Clay Center KS 67432
(785) 632-3550

Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By the Clay County Conservation District
SB 231
February 25, 2009

The Clay County Conservation District opposes Senate Bill 231. We are concerned that this bill will profoundly change the way conservation programs are administered and delivered in Kansas. Conservation districts and the State Conservation Commission have a history of successfully implementing conservation programs through a system that is voluntary and locally led. Giving the powers of the State Conservation Commission to the Secretary of Agriculture will eliminate this long standing system of grass roots control in favor of control by politicians and political appointees in Topeka.

Furthermore, we are concerned that moving conservation programs into a regulatory agency will jeopardize the good will with landowners and farm operators that conservation districts have worked diligently to build over many years. Much of the success achieved by conservation districts can be attributed to relationships built on trust. Land owners often call upon us to help resolve conflicts with regulatory agencies. If our programs are administered by a regulatory agency, we may lose the ability to serve as a buffer, or problem solver, between farmers and the enforcement arms of government.

We also oppose this bill because the proposed cost savings are vague and may not be attained. We are not convinced that the Department of Agriculture will be able to administer state conservation programs with true reductions in staff numbers. Additionally, any savings in rent will not be realized for several years because of lease agreements that will continue in effect.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument against this proposal is that it has been considered before and rejected. Quoting from page 7 of the 2008 Legislative Post Audit Report, "*Our 1996 audit reported that the Conservation Commission's programs could be transferred to another State agency, but there was no compelling reason to do so and the amount of savings that could be realized was unclear.*" In our opinion, this is still the case.

In this time of financial stress for the State of Kansas, conservation districts are willing to make reasonable sacrifices, but we want to ensure that those sacrifices result in real savings, and do not endanger the system that has served Kansas well for over 70 years. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 231.

Thank You.

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 15



Geary County Conservation District
135 E. 8th Street
Junction City, KS 66441
(785) 238-4251 - FAX (785) 238-1674

Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
By the Geary County Conservation District
SB 231
February 25, 2009

The Geary County Conservation District is writing because they believe that consolidating State Conservation Commission (SCC) with the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) is simply not warranted. Speaking from a non-co-located county conservation district, the GCCD can prove by experience that the State of Kansas will not make potential savings as outlined in the performance audit, with this consolidation. As the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is not saving by consolidating the nine USDA Service Centers across the State of Kansas, neither will the consolidation of the SCC and AHD with the KDA.

The SCC offers a high level of hands-on assistance, from guidance on district operations to providing information on state program implementation. Plus, the five members to the SCC board, who are selected by the 525 locally elected supervisors across the State of Kansas, have a thorough knowledge of conservation and the needs of the district. If a consolidation occurs, conservation districts' influence and voice in conservation will be marginalized.

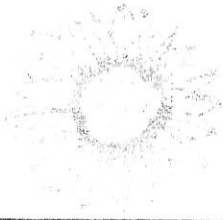
We urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 231.

Thank you for you time.

Sincerely,

Geary County Conservation District
George Poland, Chairman
Donald S. Eickholt, Vice-Chairman
Gary Schellhorn, Secretary
Charles E. Munson, Treasurer
Keith Ascher, Member

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 16



Conservation Planning For The Future



February 20, 2009

Lane County Conservation District
P.O. Box 985 — Dighton, KS 67839

RE: Senate Bill 231 – Transferring the powers and duties of the Animal Health Department and State Conservation Commission.

The Board of Supervisors of the Lane County Conservation District, urge all senators to vote NO on combining the State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture is a politically appointed regulatory agency. With each change in governorship is the probable change in leadership of the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

The State Conservation Commission is an agency governed by a grassroots elected board providing voluntary grant programs.

Combining the two agencies- State Conservation Commission and Kansas Department of Agriculture will result in the following:

1. There would NOT be a continuity of leadership for the State Conservation Commission or the 105 local county conservation districts.
2. Consolidation would mean NO voice in locally led conservation on how and where Kansas Water Plan funds will be utilized.
3. Funds targeted for State Conservation Commission volunteer grant programs could be hijacked and used for mandated regulatory programs controlled by the Kansas Department of Agriculture.
4. Consolidation would place conflicting regulatory and voluntary programs that address the same issues under one agency, i.e. Water Appropriations Act and the Stream Obstructions Act.
5. The Post Audit Report was misleading in stating that the State Conservation Commission needed to computerize various processes to free up staff time. The State Conservation Commission is fully computerized, which eliminated two full time positions within the office.

In summary, combining the agencies of State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture would be detrimental to locally led conservation efforts and we ask that all senators vote NO against Senate Bill 231.

Respectfully,

Jim Bennett, Chairperson
Lane County Conservation District

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09

Attachment 17



Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Representing Local Conservation Districts

**Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture
by Ronald Brown, Vice President
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
SB 231
February 25, 2009**

The Conservation District (CD), Watershed District, The State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have had a national partnership for over 70 years. No organization has done more for the environment, soil and water than has this partnership.

The Kansas SCC employees are trained for specific jobs, which in most cases require a lot of technical experience. An example would be the distribution of state cost share funds to each of the 105 county CD's equitably to meet state standards and time frames as the CD's and SCC operate under the state statutes. They have to be sure we (CD's) operate to the letter of the law and do many spot-checks to be sure the monies are being used as specified.

The county CD's depend on the SCC almost on a daily basis as to programs, regulations, deadlines, changes, signup dates, etc. The CD's and SCC work on a continuous basis with the local District Conservationist (NRCS) and the state NRCS office. The SCC and state NRCS work together by sharing and utilizing both state and federal programs, such as engineering, program information on doing shared projects. All of this is done to get water and soil projects on the ground in all of our 105 counties.

Looking to the future Kansas number 1 problem is and going to be water. Ground water problems in the west and surface water problems in the east are upon us now. The Kansas Water Office and SCC can be working in concert with one another may be the only agencies to handle our future critical water problems. **We have to retain our SCC as a stand- alone agency. Please vote NO on SB 231**

Senate Agriculture Committee
2-25-09
Attachment 18