



To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Representative Ken Rahjes, Chair

From: Justin Cobb, The Nature Conservancy

Date: March 4th, 2025

RE: SB 36 – Increasing the cap on the amount of moneys disbursed by the division of conservation to conservation districts and providing an increased matching basis for state moneys disbursed to conservation districts based on amounts allocated by the board of county commissioners for such districts.

Chairman Rahjes and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **proponent** testimony on **SB 36**. The Nature Conservancy in Kansas is a conservation nonprofit with a mission of conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Central to the conservancy's work is partnerships with private landowners and agricultural organizations. In these efforts, The Nature Conservancy has found conservation districts to be one of the most far reaching and highly regarded conservation entities in the state, even while they consistently struggle to provide base salaries for their employees.

Since the aftermath of the Dust Bowl, conservation districts have played a critical role in establishing sustainable agriculture and provide a host of environmental services. Often these services are done either in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or supported by cost-share from the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Conservation. Recent years have seen an influx of support for these programs as a much-needed investment in our natural resources. However, as programmatic funding has increased, operational funding has remained stagnant while expenditures rise. These robust programs do not implement themselves but rely on the hard work and good reputation of conservation district managers.

Current statute allows for state aid to conservation districts at a 1:1 match capped at \$25,000 per county. The recent enhancements to the State Water Plan Fund have provided for additional support but will be precluded without a change to the statutory limits. An increase to a 2:1 match with a \$50,000 cap is a much-needed improvement that permits the expenditure of otherwise appropriated moneys.

SB 36 would allow for increased state support of conservation districts without creating any new burdens upon the counties. This bill will increase a county's ability to hire these positions and provide critical services to their residents.

The Nature Conservancy requests that the committee report favorably on SB 36.