

KANSAS OUTDOOR HERITAGE ALLIANCE

To: House Committee on Taxation, Rep. Adam Smith, Chair

From: Kyle Pokorny on behalf of the Kansas Outdoor Heritage Alliance

Date: Feb 11, 2025

RE: HB 2097 – Providing for approval by KDWP for qualified plans and programs for tax credits

Chairman Smith and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2097. The Kansas Outdoor Heritage Alliance (KOHA) recently came together to provide the Kansas legislature with the voice of Kansas resident hunters, anglers, trappers, and houndsmen. We represent the interests of the everyday sportsmen and women out there walking in a field behind a bird dog, the angler sitting on the bank or in a small boat trying to catch a few fish to fry up, the trapper checking the line every day and the houndsmen listening to hear a dog sound off on a raccoon. KOHA represents those of us who are not looking to make money off the outdoors, but do invest our passion, time, money, and effort. We are the backbone of the financial support of the outdoors and its conservation.

The following members of the Kansas Outdoor Heritage Alliance support the passage of HB 2097:

- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, NA
- Delta Waterfowl
- Ducks Unlimited
- Flatland Fly Fishers
- Kansas Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
- Kansas Bowhunters Association
- Kansas Federation of Houndsmen
- Kansas Fur Harvesters Association
- Kansas Hunters For Access
- Kansas Walleye
- Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever

HB 2097 would grant a tax credit to Kansas landowners who choose to voluntarily engage their land in conservation and either (1) public access for hunting and fishing, or (2) management of a threatened or endangered species. This testimony will focus on the hunting and fishing aspect of HB 2097.

The tax credit proposed by HB 2097 is based on both the amount of property taxes paid by a landowner who voluntarily performs qualified conservation work on his or her land and the percentage of the year that land is open to the public for hunting or fishing. The property taxes paid on the qualifying land is multiplied by the percentage of the year the public has access to that land. That calculated amount is granted to the participating landowner as a credit on his or her income tax.

HB 2097 addresses the current problem of lack of hunting access in Kansas. There is very little public hunting available in Kansas. We are 49th out of the 50 American states in percentage of publicly owned land. Study after study finds that a lack of access is the primary reason people stop hunting or reduce the amount of time they hunt. That is particularly true here in Kansas. Our wildlife has made Kansas into a major destination for deer hunters and waterfowl hunters from around the world. The bad news for Kansas hunters is that, because of this wildlife management success, this abundant wildlife is now financially beyond the reach of many Kansans. Many deer hunting lodges in Kansas now charge \$8,000 to \$10,000 for their clients to shoot a nice buck. Most Kansas hunters simply cannot pay anything close to that amount.

One Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks program that opens up public access is the Walk In Hunting Access program(WIHA). The WIHA program operates by KDWP leasing property from willing landowners. The enrolled land is opened to the public for hunting purposes during a specified time of the year. The landowner can restrict the type of hunting the public is allowed to do. The landowner receives a payment for the lease based on many factors including: quality and type of wildlife habitat, duration of the lease, proximity to urban areas, and types of hunting allowed.

While WIHA opens some private land to the average Kansas resident hunter, larger sums of money can and are offered in many cases by commercial organizations catering to wealthy individuals who can easily outbid KDWP for quality hunting access.

Incentivizing landowners to enroll land in the WIHA program and perform conservation activities on that land helps to make the WIHA program more viable in the hunting lease market. It also encourages better quality habitat for the public to hunt. HB2097 also applies to other access programs implemented by KDWP including WIFA(Walk In Fishing Access) which opens up private waters to public fishing access.

HB 2097 would help provide the public with more hunting and fishing access, promote conservation of the land itself, and economically assist participating landowners in Kansas. The Kansas Outdoor Heritage Alliance strongly requests that the Committee pass HB 2097.

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