



The Wildlife Society
The Kansas Chapter

Promoting Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship through Science and Education

Position on Senate Bill No. 425

February 15, 2016

The Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society, representing a professional society of wildlife biologists, land managers, researchers, and educators in the state of Kansas, respectfully opposes Senate Bill No. 425 (SB 425), the provisions of which would prevent long-term protections—via conservation easements—of landscapes that are significant to the state's wildlife and ranching heritage.

SB 425 would prohibit conservation easements from exceeding the lifetime of participating landowners and could allow county governments to prevent private landowners from voluntarily protecting their lands with conservation easements. With less than 5% of land area in Kansas under public management, and a smaller percentage specifically dedicated to the protection of wildlife habitat, there is a scant amount of land in the state dedicated to wildlife conservation. Conservation easements provide a mechanism for landowners to voluntarily limit developments on their properties (e.g., such as “wind farms”) in order to preserve the intact state of their land for future generations of ranchers and wild animals.

Additionally, privately-owned wetlands, which are vital to waterfowl and other wildlife, would lose perpetual protection under Farm Bill programs. Kansas has lost nearly half of its wetlands since statehood, generally reflecting the continental loss of this valuable habitat. The United States has adopted a national goal of “no net loss” of wetlands – a goal first stated by President G.H.W. Bush and embraced by all of his successors. Failure to perpetually protect wetlands in Kansas would not align the state with this important national goal that was set, in good part, for the protection of waterfowl habitat.

Perpetual protections of vast expanses of wildlife habitat will be vital for ensuring that more wildlife species are not listed as threatened or endangered at federal or state levels. Kansas enjoys some of the most vast remaining grassland landscapes in North America, such as the Flint Hills, Smoky Hills, and Red Hills. Should these pristine grasslands—that are for the most part functional, private cattle ranches—be further fragmented by developments, our strongholds for prairie chicken populations and other grassland wildlife could be jeopardized, which would create further regulatory issues related to threatened and endangered species. We would be moving in a direction of further degradation of wildlife and toward an increasingly more complicated regulatory environment at federal and state levels.

Kansas is renowned for rancher contributions to conservation on their private lands. The Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society feels these landowners should continue to have tools, such as conservation easements, to protect their lands and livelihoods.

Respectfully submitted,

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