

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning concerning the importance of continuing to protect the rare and unique flora and fauna that resides within our state. As a biologist, I have been able to explore many special and diverse habitats across Kansas, from the Ozarks of Cherokee County in the extreme SE corner, through the Chautauqua Hills, Red Hills, Flint Hills (and they say Kansas is flat!), to the shortgrass prairie of the Cimarron National Grasslands bordering Colorado and Oklahoma. Because of Kansas' central location, a wide array of plants and animals live within our borders, and many are restricted to only one of these unique habitats.

For example, in the Kansas Ozarks and the adjacent Cherokee Lowlands, which is the wettest part of the state, we can find sassafras trees, the green frog, several species of salamanders, spiders, and mushrooms found nowhere else in the state. Likewise, the Spring, Neosho, and Verdigris Rivers are the home of a small catfish (the Neosho madtom), many kinds of fresh water mussels, the alligator snapping turtle, and a small crayfish that was first described about 25 years ago and is restricted to the Spring River.

In the summer of 1996, I and an amateur naturalist from Fredonia (Mickey McDonald), rediscovered the endangered American Burying Beetle in three counties in SE Kansas. It had not been seen within the state since 1940. Subsequent surveys sponsored by the Kansas Biological Survey and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks revealed that it is restricted to undisturbed areas with silt-loam or sandy-loam soils, and extended its known range into two more adjacent counties.

As Kansans we value our natural heritage and being close to nature. Whether your goal is to catch the largest small-mouth bass, hunt ducks, mule deer or white-tail, go on Christmas bird counts, find a timber rattler, or rare and beautiful prairie plants, such as the unique purple variety of Indian paintbrush found only in Montgomery County, we value our wildlife and wildlife habitats.

Therefore, by continuing to protect rare species within our state, we continue to protect their unique habitats for all of us to enjoy. Recently, we have seen environmental protection eroding away at the federal level. This fact makes it imperative that we, as Kansans, continue to ensure the quality of our unique and varied natural communities by strengthening our commitment to our state's wildlife, not weakening it.

This is especially true at this time, given the somewhat unpredictable effects of climate change on these species in the near future.

Therefore, I am strongly opposed to HB 2669.

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