

Date: February 14th, 2023

To: House Committee on Water
Representative Jim Minnix, Chair

From: Justin Cobb, Government Relations Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Kansas

RE: Oral Proponent Testimony – HB 2302

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2302. The Nature Conservancy is a nonpartisan, conservation nonprofit that has worked for over 30 years in Kansas to fulfill our mission of conserving the lands and water on which all life depends. We have permanently conserved over 150,000 acres in Kansas including five preserves that are open to the public. We are dedicated to conserving the natural heritage of the state and are active members of the Kansans for Conservation coalition that seeks to enhance state funding for conservation.

We applaud the committee for the depth and breadth of education presented over the weeks as well as taking expedient action to not let this pressing issue wait another year to be addressed. The Nature Conservancy wholeheartedly supports HB 2302 as the fulfillment of the needs identified for decades in Kansas. This funding will start the process of securing sustainable water, economy, and life for Kansans.

Although we support HB 2302 in its current state, we suggest that the committee adopt the below amendment clarifying eligibility and encouraging best practices concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of water conservation administration.

Add below as subsection (3) of section 1:

“(3) The Kansas water authority shall encourage funding requests from state and local entities that cooperate with qualified non-profit entities on projects that provide a direct benefit to water quantity and quality, including water infrastructures that are both natural and manmade, and include matching funds from non-state sources.”

Currently, many of the organizations doing on-the-ground water conservation in Kansas communities are not mentioned in HB 2302 and have concerns that this funding would exclude them. This amendment would solve this by providing guidance to the Kansas Water Authority to encourage funding requests that facilitate public-private partnerships, leverage non-state funds, and pursue nature-based solutions.

Engaging non-profits provides political units with access to established capacity and expertise that decreases overhead costs for projects and provides greater flexibility. There are already many non-profits working on water conservation in Kansas including the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, the Heartland Conservation Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, Playa Lakes Joint Venture and more. Securing matching or non-state funds has been highlighted as a priority for HB 2302 and non-profit partnerships are



often required for eligibility in federal and private programs. Non-profits have existing experience/relationships that heighten chances of success.

Much of the testimony provided to this committee has had an acute focus placed on the depletion of the High Plains Aquifer. To remedy the depletion of this natural resource, we most focus on nature-based solutions. Nature-based solutions are cost-effective with little maintenance and positive externalities. Initiatives such as playa restoration to facilitate aquifer recharge and woody encroachment removal to increase watershed efficiency provide lasting benefits to water, agriculture, and wildlife.

Our amendment is a friendly one that encompasses the lessons learned from the years of research conducted by the many experts who have presented to the committee. It is needed to provide clarity that the work currently being conducted and that which has been recommended remains eligible for funding.

In the amendment's development, we caucused with committee members, water officials, and stakeholders to ensure that it will not provide any additional difficulty or complication to the progress we all desire to see.

We appreciate your consideration of this amendment and urge you to pass HB 2302.