

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

**From: Jim Sipes, Kansas Farm Bureau**

**Date: February 6, 2023**

**Re: SCR 1602 - Disapproving the designation of the lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species in Kansas by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.**

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Chairmen Rahjes and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SCR 1602. My name is Jim Sipes, and I am speaking today on behalf of Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) where I serve the southwest part of the state as the District 9 Board Member. KFB is the state's largest general farm organization representing more than 30,000 farm and ranch families through our 105 county Farm Bureau Associations.

I am the fifth generation on my family's farm in Morton and Stanton County. My farm falls in the middle of the Sand Sagebrush Prairie Ecosystem where the population of the Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPC) has struggled due to extreme weather, specifically a blizzard followed by exceptional droughts. Over the years I have become a reluctant expert on the LPC as I have worked with groups from 5 states attempting to conserve the LPC to prevent a listing and to prevent any adverse impacts to farmers and ranchers throughout the historic range of the species. I thank this committee for their support in disapproving the listing of the LPC as a threatened species.

Preserving natural surroundings for America's wildlife has long been the priority of America's farmers and ranchers. Today, more than 140 million privately owned farm and ranch acres are enrolled in voluntary federal conservation programs, providing habitats for countless animals and insects. Species protection can be more effectively achieved by providing incentives to private landowners and public land uses rather than by imposing land use restrictions and penalties. We must preserve the species but also preserve farming and ranching and voluntary, incentive-based conservation management plans provide a better alternative for species conservation than placing species on threatened or endangered lists.

Kansas Farm Bureau is pleased by the presence of the 4(d) rule exceptions for continued, routine agricultural practices on existing cultivated land and prescribed fire for grassland management, but need further clarification on the rule for grazing land. We appreciate that Fish and Wildlife Services recognized the benefits that grazing can have on LPC habitat, but we are still evaluating rule to determine if it is a workable solution for landowners wanting to provide conservation and limit their potential take liability. KFB is working to help identify persons, agencies and organizations that may be in a position to become a FWS approved party to write grazing plans to meet the needs of landowners. Additionally, some uncertainty remains regarding how Conservation Reserve Program land and Natural Resources Conservation Services programs will be impacted by the listing which will not be established until after the final listing effective date.

Chairmen Rahjes and committee, again, thank you for your support of farmers and ranchers in Kansas in disapproving this listing and the opportunity to express our support for SCR 1602. I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.