

January 22, 2024

Chair Rahjes and members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks would like to provide you with informational testimony regarding HB 2541, which would establish a state conservation fund using money from the lottery operating fund. The agency is neutral on much of the legislation that would not have any impact on the agency, including any potential source of funding, but we wanted to provide you with information on how the agency would manage the new funding if this legislation were to be approved.

The purpose of this testimony is twofold: 1) To describe the agency's capacity for administering such programming, and 2) to inform you about the funding and some of the functions of the Department.

The Department of Wildlife and Parks sees the value of such a fund for conservation efforts across the state of Kansas. As one of the agencies that would be required to administer the grants described in HB 2541, the agency has the capacity to fulfill the requirements of this legislation. If passed, the agency may need to seek approval to hire additional FTEs to process grant applications and establish the required advisory boards. It's our understanding that this would be an allowable use of funding under the provisions of HB 2541.

KDWP's fish and wildlife programs are funded in two ways: 1) the sale of hunting, fishing, and furharvesting licenses and permits sold to both residents and non-residents, and 2) federal dollars returned to Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks from federal excise taxes on equipment purchases made by hunters and anglers. The amount of money KDWP receives from these excise taxes depends on the number of licenses and permits sold, as a 25% match is required from our fee funds.

Some agency programs are currently limited by state funding and would be bolstered by a state conservation fund. Our Habitat First Program allows KDWP to partner with private landowners who want to establish and improve wildlife habitat on their lands. In 2020, KDWP helped Kansans enhance more than 13,000 acres for wildlife habitat. This program could be expanded with additional matching funds.

Additionally, our Parks Division administers programs with unmet needs. The National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides grants for planning and development of state and local outdoor recreation facilities. It provides 50% matching funds on a reimbursement basis. Recreational Trails Grants provide an 80% reimbursement to

outdoor recreation projects, including those related to new and existing trails and trailheads. Traditionally, KDWP has awarded about 50% of grant money to local sponsors. Our neighboring states have received about \$102 million more in LWCF than Kansas, so there is potential for greater investment with an increase in available matching funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information regarding HB 2541.