



**To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chair**

**From: Ben Postlethwait, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Kansas**

**Date: January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**

**RE: HB 2541 – Establishing a state conservation fund**

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Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2541. The Nature Conservancy in Kansas is a conservation nonprofit with a mission of conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We manage over 60,000 acres across 10 counties and have a conservation impact on an additional 100,000 acres across the state. The Nature Conservancy is a founding member of the Kansans for Conservation coalition which has led the collaborative drafting process of HB 2541.

The Nature Conservancy and our members believe in a world where the diversity of life thrives. That means people take action to conserve nature for its own sake and for its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives. There are few investments more critical to the quality of life in Kansas. Our economic success, public health, and future generations depend on us maintaining and improving Kansas's prairies and fields, rivers and streams, wildlife and human livelihoods through conservation. Because there is not adequate state funding for conservation, Kansas misses out on federal and private matching dollars that most states—including all four of our neighbors—receive because they have already established dedicated conservation funding.

Since 1965, The Nature Conservancy has worked collaboratively with private landowners and state agencies to protect and restore the unique landscapes of Kansas, particularly our treasured grasslands. Many times, The Nature Conservancy has leveraged private donations against federal programs, like those available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to produce outcomes that benefit both biodiversity and agriculture. However, many of these programs require substantial match from state agencies or other sources. For example, without a state conservation fund, Kansas is missing opportunities to retain intact, native prairies that have served generations of ranchers and their communities in the Flint Hills. We have the tools to support producers so they aren't forced to divide the ranch just to balance the books, but often it's an initial investment that's the barrier. A state conservation fund could be used as required match for federal Farm Bill programs that offer cost-sharing reimbursements for farmers and ranchers.

The people and natural systems of Kansas are intrinsically linked. The consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss can be seen across the state but by working together, we can see a resilient future for Kansas. We commit to continuing our work in Kansas, we ask the state to commit to conservation with a dedicated fund that can be used to bring even more investment. Therefore, we ask you to support HB 2541.