



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

From: Laura Downey, Executive Director, Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)

Date: January 22nd, 2024

RE: HB 2541 – Establishing a state conservation fund

Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2541.

One of the first and largest conservation and environmental education organizations in the nation, KACEE is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization established in 1969. KACEE's mission is to accelerate environmental literacy and conservation in Kansas through non-biased, science-based environmental education. We believe that everyone has a seat at the table when it comes to environmental education and have worked to engage a diverse statewide partner network of more than 700 organizations, businesses, agencies and schools and 350 individuals. At the core of our work is environmental education professional development. Since 1970, KACEE has provided professional development for more than 25,000 educators, impacting an estimated 350,000 Kansas students. KACEE also coordinates the Kansas Green School network, working with over 478 schools and 19 school districts from across the state in engaging students to lead the way in creating greener and healthier schools. We are members of the Kansans for Conservation coalition which has led the collaborative drafting process of HB 2541.

Investing in conservation is critical to the quality of life in Kansas. Our economic success, public health, and future generations are dependent upon us maintaining and improving these resources. In the immediate term, conservation funding supports on the ground projects and allows Kansas to provide needed matching funding to access federal funding we currently leave on the table. By also investing in quality of life through dedicated funding for outdoor recreation and education, this funding contributes to the creation of a future generation which is connected to our unique natural assets, values and prioritizes conservation and has the knowledge and skills to be good future stewards of our resources. The long-term impact of such education is the development of a society that actively values and participates in conservation efforts. This proposed bill addresses both the immediate and long-term conservation needs in our state.

For KACEE and for conservation and environmental education in Kansas, this funding would dramatically impact our ability to support classroom teachers with professional learning and access to high quality lessons and resources aimed at engaging students in hands on learning about our Kansas environment and resources. It could provide critical funding to schools for field trips engaging students with direct experiences in the spaces which showcase the unique



and special ecological features and resources throughout our state. This funding could help to expand the Kansas Green Schools program and engage students in investigating, problem-solving and conserving resources in their schools and districts. And finally, this funding would support those who offer programs to schools and districts, programs which serve large geographic areas, sometimes with just one staff person. Expanding these programs will reach more students and ultimately support the long-term vision of Kansans who actively work to sustain our communities and our state for generations to come.

As outlined above and by our fellow coalition members, the establishment of state conservation funding benefits all Kansans, allows for the proper stewardship of the resources bestowed upon us, and enables the state to be competitive for match opportunities. Therefore, we ask you to support HB 2541.

Submitted by Laura Downey, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)