

Testimony to the House Water Committee

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Dan Meyerhoff, executive director for the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts. KACD represents the 105 conservation districts in Kansas. Also with me today is Amanda Scott. Amanda is the District Manager for the Cowley County Conservation District and also is currently the President for the KACD Employee Organization.

The mission statement of KACD and its member districts is “Providing local leadership to protect and improve Kansas Natural Resources through collaboration, education and implementation.”

Each conservation district has a governing board of 5 volunteer supervisors, 525 statewide that provide leadership in addressing natural resource concerns at the local level. Districts also have administrative staff at the local level and in some counties technical support positions.

Conservation districts are a sub division of State Government, enacted into law in 1937 by the state legislature. The KDA-Division of Conservation administers conservation district law and works hand in hand with conservation districts to deliver a variety of programs to our farmers, ranchers and homeowners.

Each district is a stand alone governmental entity. While districts are a sub-division of state government, their funding source represents a very unique partnership from the local state and federal level. Districts base funding comes from the county commissions. State statute allows for a match of county funding up to \$25,000, those funds coming from the state water plan. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts in recent years the state only matched \$.83 this past year for each county dollar that conservation districts receive. The federal support comes from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers in all 105 counties through a network of field offices located in 95 counties. In those 95 counties NRCS provides conservation districts office space, equipment and training in return for administrative and technical support in delivering federal programs.

Districts are the local delivery system for many state conservation programs at the local level. All of these programs play a role in meeting the objectives and goals of the state’s water vision.

These programs are depicted on the slide. When a farmer or rancher is wanting assistance addressing a natural resource issue on their land, the local USDA service center is often their first stop and the conservation district manager is often their first contact. District managers can explain the various programs that are available and directs them to NRCS or CD technical staff help determine the appropriate practice to apply to address their concerns. Another benefit to the unique relationship that conservation districts have with NRCS ready availability to soil conservationists, agronomists, engineers, biologists, range conservationists, etc, that can provide assistance to our customers. Districts also have 44 technical positions, obtained through a variety of agreements with state agencies, NRCS and our National Association that

provide funding for these positions working side by side with NRCS technical staff to provide technical assistance in delivering these state and federal programs.

In return for the support that we receive from NRCS, districts provide administrative and technical assistance in delivering Farm Bill programs to our customers. This past year these programs delivered over \$57 million in financial incentives to implement conservation practices on Kansas private lands.

Holding true to our mission statement, districts collaborate with a myriad of local, state and federal agencies as well as non-governmental organizations to identify resource issues and prioritize actions and initiatives. We know that we can achieve much more working together with all of these organizations and agencies as we all have a common goal.

Conservation Districts have a very extensive Education and Outreach program in many counties which can play a major role with the information and education goals of the Water Vision. We have that local presence in every county with knowledge of those communities and ability to coordinate, facilitate and present. In many cases district events are a multi-organization effort, highlighting the importance of collaboration.

Whether it be the Water Festival in Garden City or Topeka, Conservation Roundup in Colby, A Day on The Farm, Slice of Ag which is held at the Overland Park Event Center, districts reach thousands of elementary and high school students each year. We also sponsor the Envirothon competitions for high school students across the state.

Adult education activities include workshops and field days addressing soil health, range management, wetland restoration, irrigation management, all of these topics addressing Water Vision goals and objectives

Districts play a significant role through newsletters, social media, local radio and newspapers informing farmers and ranchers of District and partner sponsored events that are upcoming as well as special programs and initiatives.

The USDA Farm Bill gives conservation districts across the nation the responsibility for hosting and chairing a local work group meeting annually. Local partners along with agricultural producers, owners and operators and citizens interested in conservation are invited to participate in these work group meetings. The role of the local work group is to identify agricultural and natural resource issues in their local communities and provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities. Districts gather this information from the local group and provide to NRCS and the state technical committee to make decisions in carrying out natural resource conservation programs and activities. The data gathered by local work groups can also be used by state agencies to prioritize their program delivery in the state.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with the committee the important role conservation districts play in natural resource conservation and would entertain any questions you may have.

