



Our Why

Evidence shows that current conservation efforts are not sufficient to ensure a future with healthy and sustainable water, land, and outdoor recreation resources for Kansas. As a result, the agriculture, industry, and quality of life that depend on these resources is threatened.

Kansas Polling

- In a 2019 survey, most Kansans, and their Great Plains neighbors, said that being in nature is important to them –that it brought them a sense of peace and some of their happiest memories. Most Kansans also agree that too little money is spent on conservation.
- Kansans solidly support increasing funding for conservation, and **63% of Kansans said they would feel more positively about their State Legislator** and other government leaders who support increased spending on conservation and outdoor recreation. This view was expressed throughout the state and across party lines. Top-tier conservation funding priorities focus on water, wildlife, and farms.
- **95% of Kansas voters said that ensuring adequate water for people is extremely or very important.** Nearly 90% placed the highest importance on conserving and restoring land around lakes, rivers, and streams to ensure water quality.

Neighboring States

Other Heartland states, like Minnesota, Arkansas, Missouri, and Nebraska have made major, long-term financial commitments to their citizens' quality of life through better stewardship of their water, land, and outdoor heritage. It is now time for Kansas to do the same.

- Missouri currently dedicates 1/10th of 1% of the existing sales tax to fund state parks and soil and water conservation efforts. This tax must be reauthorized by voters every 10 years. It generates ~\$90 million a year and has been reauthorized 4 times.
 - *Funding supports a wide range of conservation benefits, from partnerships to promote pollinator and quail habitat, soil health, and water quality on private lands to large-scale grassland restoration work which benefits cattle producers.*

- In Arkansas, voters approved a constitutional Amendment dedicating a portion of the existing sales tax for land conservation. Revenue is split between the state Game & Fish Department and the State Parks Department. This provides \$40 to \$60 million annually.
 - *This funding has supported the creation of four public nature centers and provided over \$100 million for major renovations and capital improvements to state parks.*
- In Minnesota, voters approved a constitutional amendment increasing the sales tax by 3/8th of 1% until 2034 for the Minnesota Legacy Fund. The Fund allocates revenue to the Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund, and the Parks & Trails Fund.
 - *Recent projects include restoring fish passages and irrigation workshops and on-farm nitrogen management programs.*
- Since 1992, the Nebraska Environmental Trust has provided \$320 million to projects across the state using revenue from the Nebraska Lottery. Projects range from habitat restoration and preservation to water conservation, waste management, air quality, soil management, and environmental education.
 - *Recent projects include control of Eastern Red Cedar and other invasive species and integrated water management planning and implementation.*

How much do we need?

The annual expenditure necessary to begin to overcome pressing challenges to Kansas's land, water, and community and outdoor recreational and educational opportunities is estimated to be at least \$150 million.

Potential Funding Sources

- Through the 2019 survey, a majority of voters say they would vote for an array of taxes or revenue streams if the funding were dedicated to conserving land, wildlife, and water, and providing recreation. In fact, these funding options receive solid support across the partisan spectrum.
- Dedicating existing sales-tax revenue from outdoor recreational equipment (e.g., Texas, Georgia) or a portion of lottery revenues (e.g., Oregon, Colorado) had the largest percentage of favorable votes.
- 77% of voters also support dedicating gaming taxes if Kansas legalizes betting on sporting events.
- Other options include increasing the current statewide sales tax by 1/10th of one cent (e.g., Minnesota) or dedicating a portion of the existing state sales tax (e.g., Arkansas, Missouri).

Key Benefits and Outcomes

Land & Water

Greater than three-fourths of Kansas stream miles are contaminated, dry, or otherwise impaired for human use; many of these streams flow into the state's public water supply reservoirs. It is more cost-effective to prevent water quality degradation before it occurs, by applying proven land management practices across the state. By using both nature-based and engineered land management practices, the state's waters can be improved without undue impacts to industry, agriculture, or municipalities. Dedicated funding could support:

- Recovery and stability in ground and surface waters
- Dam/watershed management for improved reservoir life, recreation, water quality and habitat
- Riparian and wetland restoration and protection for water quality and flood prevention
- Restoration and management of Kansas wind breaks, forests, and timber resources
- More effective and safe use of prescribed fire and reduced wildfire losses
- Protection of important grazing lands and grassland habitats

Quality of Life, Opportunity, & Economy

Two in three Kansans take part in some form of outdoor recreation each year. Investing in outdoor infrastructure, such as parks, trails, and protected natural areas, provides quality of life, attracts businesses to communities, and provides safe places for families to recreate and experience the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors. Even more families have taken advantage of outdoor recreational opportunities since the coronavirus pandemic. Dedicated funding could provide:

- Increased access to trails, quality habitat, and natural areas for hunting, angling, camping, hiking, boating, and other outdoor pursuits.
- Improved environmental conditions in under-represented communities
- Improved local, county and state recreation facilities and parks
- Expanded outdoor recreation and education opportunities including Kansas's urban populations
- Increased outdoor, nature, and agriculture education and awareness opportunities
- Increased education and employment opportunities in agriculture and outdoor recreation fields

Agriculture

Productive lands are the building blocks for Kansas' agriculture, which contributed \$65.7 billion dollars to the state's economy in 2019. Working farms and ranches produce food for a growing global population and raw materials for industry. The vast majority –87.5% –of all Kansas land is used for agricultural production, presenting the best opportunity in Kansas to support and enhance our protected recreational lands through practices that improve water quality and hydrology, soil health, and habitat. Dedicated funding could finance:

- Irrigation efficiency
- Grazing land rest, rotation, and management
- Soil health, stability, productivity, and agriculture profitability
- Job creation in sustainable agriculture technology
- Comprehensive management of harmful invasive plants
- Substantial soil carbon markets
- Expanded agricultural tourism and outdoor recreation revenue to support economic growth
- Restoration of marginal/unproductive lands

What grant funding is Kansas missing without matching funds?

Without adequate resources to match grant program dollars, Kansas is missing out on millions of dollars a year for conservation through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Farm Bill, North America Wetlands Conservation Act, and other public and private programs. Dedicated statewide funding for conservation would allow Kansas to leverage significantly more funding for recreation, agriculture, land, and water.

- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Grants Program – The fund has provided 40,400 grants to state and local governments over 40 years for \$4.1 billion, matched for a total of \$8.2 billion. Now permanently and fully funded at **\$900 million per year**. LWCF program is a 50-50 matching reimbursement program.
- USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – RCPP is now a standalone program with its own funding--**\$300 million annually**. It is NRCS's goal that partner contributions at least equal the NRCS investment in an RCPP project. Substantive partner contributions are given priority consideration as part of the RCPP application evaluation criteria.
- USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) – The program was re-authorized to be funded at \$700 million a year. Currently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 funds AFRI at **\$415 million**. Grants have a 20-100% matching requirement.
- USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - **\$450 million per year** for ACEP. 25-50% match is required.
- US Fish & Wildlife Service North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) – In the past two decades, NAWCA has funded over 3,000 projects totaling \$1.83 billion in grants. These grant programs require anywhere between 1:1 and 3:1 matching funds. **\$60 million is authorized for 2021**.
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) – **Since 1984, NFWF has received \$1.86 billion** in federal funding and leveraged that public investment with private funding that has resulted in a total conservation impact of \$6.1 billion. For Federal grants NFWF requires a 2:1 match -- \$2 raised in matching contributions to every federal dollar awarded.

Kansans for Conservation Coalition

Water – Working Lands – Quality of Life



KANSANS

for **conservation**

Statement of Purpose

Investing in Our State's Natural Resource Legacy

Kansas' abundant water, rich soils, diverse wildlife, fresh air, and wide-open spaces support the well-being of its people, families, and communities. However, both new and chronic challenges threaten these resources. Evidence shows that current conservation efforts, even aided by nature's resilience and ability to restore itself, are not sufficient to ensure a future with water, working lands, nor our way of life. As a result, agriculture, industry and quality of life that depends on these resources is threatened.

Some of the natural resource issues Kansans face are daunting, but the Kansans for Conservation coalition is committed to working together to ensure that our communities, economy, and individual well-being continue to be fueled by nature. The coalition originated with multi-sector partnerships dedicated to addressing the challenges facing our state's natural resources by securing stable, long-term funding for conservation strategies to meet those challenges. The coalition is committed to broadening these partnerships to be inclusive of the diversity found in Kansas, including racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographical diversity.

Our Guiding Principles

The Coalition's Guiding Principles are to:

- Steward water, land, wildlife, and wild places for long-term sustainability, quality of life, and economic vitality.
- Be inclusive and provide and encourage access to natural resources and outdoor recreation for *all* Kansans.
- Work together with the agriculture community and economic stakeholders.
- Consider the long-term impacts of changing temperature and precipitation patterns.

Most Kansans, and their Great Plains neighbors, said through a national study that being in nature is important to them – that it brought them a sense of peace and some of their happiest memories. In the same study, two in three participants said being outdoors was important for their physical and emotional well-being.¹ Studies around the country and world continue to show that spending time outdoors in nature is fundamental to human health and well-being. Therefore it is critical that every Kansan has the opportunity to engage outdoors.

¹ Nature of Americans, 2016

Access to water, land, wild places, and outdoor recreation are fundamentally important to Kansans. Wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing are lifelong pursuits for many of our citizens. Yet, some Kansans historically have had little or no access to these natural resources and to nature-based recreation. As a result, they may not currently feel safe or welcome in these activities.

Beyond respite and retreat, the water and land of Kansas are the foundation on which our economy is built. For many Kansans, natural resources pay mortgages, sustain businesses, and feed their families. This reliance on our natural environment has long supported the people of Kansas, and it remains a cornerstone of our economy.

Productive working lands and a healthy natural environment are not only compatible outcomes, neither can be achieved without the other. Kansas farmers and ranchers feed the world while hosting a variety of wildlife on their lands. The coalition and the organizations that comprise it, in partnership with agricultural producers, seeks to protect our natural assets, our agricultural economy, and our food security for generations to come. The landscape of ranchers and farmers is changing, and we want to ensure that we provide access to new and diverse future farmers/ranchers that already understand the need for healthy soil and sustainable agricultural practices.

Changing temperature and precipitation patterns impact nearly all industries in Kansas, but especially agriculture. More severe heat extremes, drought, and precipitation events destabilize agricultural operations and markets. The Earth's more rapidly changing climate will impact the Kansas economy and the well-being of Kansans far into the future. A state-wide survey found that 91% of Kansans believe we should be doing more to address our changing climate.² Kansas is expected to see increasing temperatures and more variable precipitation,³ which threatens to reverse gains made through other conservation efforts. Climate change impacts every Kansan, but especially vulnerable populations such as the elderly, youth, and economically disadvantaged communities. It is critical that efforts to address climate change focuses on these vulnerable populations.

Support for this effort must come from farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers, birders, boaters, campers, hikers, nature lovers, the business community, legislators, government agencies, and non-governmental agencies - from ALL Kansans. All working toward a sustainable natural resource future. Decisions we make now will determine our natural resource legacy for generations to come. All Kansans should be equipped with the knowledge and understanding to make informed decisions about our natural resources.

Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies

Water

Water is important to every Kansan, every day. Clean, available water is vital for agriculture and industry; the health of our families, communities, and businesses; and the wild and natural environment. Most Kansans' drinking water comes from public supplies in rivers and lakes. Much of Kansas' crop production relies on irrigation from limited groundwater supplies.

² Kansas State University, 2013

³ Kansas Health Institute, 2019

Strikingly, three-fourths of Kansas stream miles are contaminated or otherwise impaired for human use, and these streams flow into the state's public water supply reservoirs.

Treating water to remove contaminants to make it suitable for agricultural, industrial, municipal, or residential use is expensive. It is more cost-effective to prevent water quality degradation before it occurs, by applying proven land management practices across the state. By using both nature-based and engineered land management practices, the state's waters can be improved without undue impacts to industry, agriculture, or municipalities.

Working Lands

Productive lands are the building blocks for Kansas' agriculture, which contributed \$65.7 billion dollars to the state's economy in 2019.⁴ Working farms and ranches produce food for a growing global population and raw materials for industry. The vast majority – 87.5% – of all Kansas land is used for agricultural production, but the health of the land itself is threatened in some cases, by lack of organic matter, microbial action, and soil cover. Conserving and sustainably managing cropland and grazing lands, in concert with agricultural producers, is essential to our future.

Healthy soils are the foundation of productive agricultural lands and clean waters. When croplands are managed for soil health, the soils resist erosion, crops thrive, and waterways flow clear. The same can be said for conserving grasslands, where the deep roots of native prairie plants create structure that holds soils in place and water underground, providing natural resilience to drought. Healthy grasslands also store carbon deep underground, keeping it out of the atmosphere. Trees provide air pollution removal and water quality protection. Streambank buffers reduce sedimentation that fills reservoirs, filter contaminants otherwise requiring water treatment.

In Colorado, the return on investments for conservation easement purchases has been calculated in to be between 5 and 13 to 1.⁵ In other states, studies suggest the ecosystem benefits (e.g. water quality, soil health, wildlife benefits, etc.) yield much higher returns.⁶

Abundant wildlife indicates a healthy environment and supports Kansans' quality of life and economic well-being. Unfortunately, as many as one-third of all animal species in the United States are at increased risk of extinction, and Kansas is no exception. The alarming decline of pollinators is one example of how wildlife losses can harm our economy.⁷ In some cases, as with the lesser prairie-chicken and whooping crane, the Kansas landscape provides unique and critical habitat strongholds that don't exist anywhere else. As grassland and wetland habitats decline across the country, what remains in Kansas becomes even more precious.

Quality of Life

Outdoor recreation, including activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and wildlife viewing is a major contributor to our economy, generating several billion dollars annually in consumer spending. Two in three Kansans take part in some form of outdoor recreation each year.⁸ Investing in outdoor

⁴ Kansas Department of Agriculture, 2019

⁵ http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2017/ColoradoStateU_CE-ROI-study_web.pdf

⁶ https://rangelandtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ESS_Executive-Summary_Corrected.pdf

⁷ Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 2015

⁸ Outdoor Industry Association, 2017

infrastructure, such as parks, trails, and natural areas, provides quality of life, attracts businesses to communities, and provides safe places for families to recreate and experience the physical and mental health benefits of being outdoors. It has become even more so since the coronavirus pandemic.

Education is an important part of ensuring that our children have quality opportunities to experience the outdoors. Understanding our natural environment helps both children and adults enjoy nature and is an important component in the long-term success of conservation efforts. Many Kansans who are now removed from the farm want and need to understand the technology, economy, and culture of farming and ranching in the state. People who possess a broad understanding of environmental, agricultural, and outdoor recreation issues, combined with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, can support the quality-of-life, economic vigor, and cultural richness that typifies Kansas. Education programs are also important in instilling a love for nature and the outdoors.

Investing in Conservation is Investing in Our Future

The choices made today about investing in our state's natural resource legacy will be history-making, determining the quality of our lives and the strength of our economy in the years to come.

In the same national study, where Kansans and other Midwesterners indicated the importance of nature to their health, most supported increases in programs to access and enjoy nature, wildlife, and the outdoors. A strong majority said that not enough money is spent on conservation.⁹ In a 2019 survey, a large majority of Kansans said they would be more likely to vote for legislators and other government leaders who support increased spending on conservation and outdoor recreation. Not surprisingly, water conservation ranked high among respondents' concerns.

The natural resource challenges facing Kansans are enormous and reversing them demands a determined and powerful effort. Significant and sustained funding is essential. The challenge is daunting, but if it is neglected, the lives of Kansans and the robust character of the state will be forever diminished.

Other Heartland states, like Minnesota, Arkansas, and Missouri, have made major, long-term financial commitments to their citizens' quality of life through better stewardship of their water, land, and outdoor heritage. It is now time for Kansas to do the same. The Kansans for Conservation Coalition is dedicated to working with our state's leaders, the agriculture community, and all conservation stakeholders (all Kansans) to create a fiscally responsible and publicly acceptable pathway to investing in our conservation legacy.

⁹ Nature of Americans, 2016

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Investments in Our Future

The following represent priority investments for a future that supports and sustains ALL Kansans. Undergirding each investment is a commitment to equitable distribution of ecosystem services, priority access to assistance for historically underserved communities, and communications that reach underserved communities.

WATER

Establish state matching funds to:

- Capture federal funds and other resources available for wetland and riparian area protection, including the use of conservation easements
- Restore stream connectivity and health by removing aging and hazardous dams, providing fish passage structures, and reconnecting stream channels with natural flood plains.

Fund:

- Creation, protection, restoration, enhancement and maintenance of wetland and aquatic habitats
- Restoration and stabilization of altered and unstable stream channels, using natural and engineered solutions.
- Support of cost-effective and improved flood control measures, including managed forest riparian buffers, floodplain reconnection, and wetland development and restoration.

Provide financial incentives and/or technical assistance for:

- Watershed management planning and practice implementation in all regions of Kansas
- Creation of the broad use of water and soil management practices that reduce agricultural water demand; improve range management, incentivize broad use of field borders, riparian buffers, reduced tillage, cover crops, and less water-intensive crops.
- Equitable water right retirement to reduce water demand in over-subscribed basins and groundwater areas; restore aquifer supplies, environmental stream flows, and wetlands.
- Widespread adoption of soil health practices that improve water-holding capacity and drought resilience in crop production.
- Improvement in groundwater and stream flows by advancing irrigation efficiency and crop technology.

Utilize reservoir dredging where it presents an economically and ecologically sound solution to lost storage capacity.

Identify and create uses and markets for lower quality water.

Modify reservoir dam operations, based on science and consensus of stakeholders, to reduce downstream erosion and provide for ecologically beneficial flows that support fish, wildlife, and aquatic recreation.

Develop career pathways and technical education programs to provide support for water conservation in agriculture and other realms.

Support research to improve groundwater and stream flows by advancing irrigation efficiency and crop technology.

WORKING LANDS

Provide state matching funds necessary to capture federal and other resources available for grassland protection, including the use of conservation easements.

Provide financial incentives and/or technical assistance for:

- Managing deciduous forests, including regenerating key cottonwood stands and monitoring for disease and problem insects.
- Broad use of prescribed fire that benefits grazing operations, ecosystem health, and water resources.
- Encouraging cropping systems to reduce soil erosion and promote soil health.
- Assisting landowners and operators in achieving optimal ecological and agricultural management of native grasslands and forests lands.
- Assisting landowners and managers in testing and implementing new farming and ranching practices that benefit both ecosystem health and economic well-being.
- Forest management in both rural and urban areas, including professional and layperson training.
- Ensuring that only non-invasive trees are used in shelterbelts and windbreaks.

Develop robust markets for soil carbon and other agriculture-dependent ecosystem services, as well as soil health and land management practices necessary to capture those markets.

Fund conservation easements for the protection of large, intact and connected areas of private native grasslands (including CRP tracts) and forests.

Conduct research necessary for a comprehensive exotic and invasive species management program, including assistance with prescribed fire, mechanical practices, and other techniques.

Provide public education and information regarding the impacts of ecosystem fragmentation, woody plant invasion, ill-sited energy development, and other land uses.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Provide financial incentives and/or technical assistance for:

- Encouraging landowners to provide access for outdoor recreation including opportunities to help landowners in low-income regions of Kansas.
- Local, county, and state recreational facilities development, operations, and maintenance in order to promote exposure to and conservation of natural areas.
- Expanding and enhancing the Kansas stream access program.

Support the creation/implementation of:

- Civic groups dedicated to improving inclusion in outdoor recreation education and natural
- Urban and rural trail systems that can be used for recreation and to improve human health.

Sources: *A Long-Term Vision for the Future of Water Supply in Kansas, 2015*; *Kansans for Conservation – What’s at stake? Understanding the Need for Public Funding, 2019*; Kansas Conservation Funding Coalition 2020; Sustainable Rivers Coalition, 2020; *Kansas Wildlife Action Plan, 2015*; *Kansas Forest Action Plan, 2010*; *Kansans for Children & Nature: Three-year plan 2011*; *Kansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2015*; *An Action Plan for People & Nature, 2018, TNC*

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- Nature-contact spaces and opportunities for urban, suburban and rural children.
- Statewide approach providing safe and accessible outdoor recreational opportunities for all Kansas communities, including access to natural areas, through the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
- Statewide education programs for students to learn the values of conservation and gain appreciation for the outdoors in alignment with the Kansas Green Schools Program.
- A state youth conservation corps or similar natural-resource-oriented jobs program

Support underrepresented groups engaging with outdoor recreation.

Update and maintain Kansas' recreational lands and facilities database.

Aid parents in feeling safe and confident in exploring natural areas with their children.