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Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Testimony on Senate Bill 46
Tracy Streeter, Director, Kansas Water Office
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Chairman Kerschen and members of the Committee, I am Tracy Streeter, Director of the Kansas Water Office, and I wish to provide testimony in favor of Senate Bill 46, as it relates to Water Conservation Areas (WCAs).

WCAs are an important management tool that will help us conserve water in the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer. As noted in the 2017 KWA Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature, WCAs allow for increased voluntary measures to conserve water by allowing a water right holder or group of water right holders to develop a water management plan to conserve ground and/or surface water. Currently, there are three WCAs in operation with three additional WCAs expected to be operational for the 2017 growing season.

WCAs are an excellent to tool to assist in changing the mindset of maximizing water use to that of managing a limited water resource. T & O Farms, one of the three operational WCAs was also one of our three 2016 Water Technology Farms (WTFs). The primary objective of T & O Farms was to reduce overall water use while maintaining profitability. Over 200 attended a Field Day at the farm which showcased the latest in irrigation technology and the approach taken to reduce pumping and extend the life of the Ogallala Aquifer. Preliminary 2016 results of the T & O Farms WCA/WTF indicate that actual water use reductions exceeded the annual planned water use. Kansas State University Research and Extension is currently evaluating the economic results at T & O Farms and a report is forthcoming.

While there is widespread support for WCAs and significant interest exists among water right holders, concerns have been raised relative to the potential impacts to adjacent water right holders resulting from the WCA management plan allowing water use to increase in some areas so long as the overall WCA water budget is not exceeded. This flexibility is a major motivation of water users to consider a WCA and affords the producer the opportunity to seek the highest economic value of the water pumped while staying within the overall WCA water allocation. In my opinion, Section 2, paragraph (g) of SB 46 addresses these concerns and clearly states that no management plan under a WCA shall be allowed to impair any water right. Similar flexibilities have been afforded to water users within the Sheridan County Local Enhanced Management Area which has been in existence for four growing seasons. To my knowledge, no impairment to adjacent water users has been reported to the Chief Engineer from Sheridan County.

Conserving and extending the usable lifetime of the Ogallala Aquifer and sustaining the usable lifetime of the remainder of the High Plains Aquifer in Kansas are the primary regional goals within the Governor's Water Vision. WCAs and the proposed amendments contained in SB 46 will assist water users to consider a mindset of conserving a limited water resource with the flexibilities to maximize profitability.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear today in support of SB 46 and will stand for questions at the appropriate time.