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Kansas Water Office
900 SW Jackson Street Suite 404
Topeka, Kansas 66612

RE: Comments regarding the update of the Kansas Water Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

After reviewing the Kansas Water Plan, Audubon of Kansas recognizes that the plan comprehensively outlines the historic and current water challenges facing our state. Namely, that the amount of groundwater is declining. In some areas, the accelerating rate of decline and increasing sedimentation in reservoirs is a challenge that both threatens sources of drinking water and reduces the system's capacity to manage flooding events. Perhaps most importantly to Kansas citizens, water quality declines threaten our drinking water supply. **However, the recommendations given in the plan do not provide leadership, strategy, or funding to meet these challenging or urgent needs; the plan only continues the status quo. Additionally, the plan does not provide for the needs of wildlife and wild lands.** Given the resurgence of interest in opportunities to explore wild areas that arose during the COVID pandemic, conservation of natural resources should be an integral component of any statewide water plan in Kansas.

We offer the following recommendations, similar to the Kansas Rural Center, that comprise a bold, but necessary, step forward in managing Kansas' water resources.

1) There is an urgent need to conserve water resources. The draft Kansas Water Plan approaches Kansas' water challenges with 'business as usual' strategies that have unclear or limited results. We need bold and transformative action now to preserve our water resources for current and future generations.

2) Ecosystems, habitat, and wildlife should be considered in the plan. Water is necessary for all life (human and otherwise); the draft Kansas Water Plan is overly narrow in considering only human interests. We need more focus on how our water plan addresses ecosystems, habitat, and wildlife.

3) A dedicated funding source is vital and appropriate. We must increase our fiscal commitment to Kansas' water resources. The State Water Plan's work has suffered from inadequate funding. Therefore, lawmakers need to stipulate locked-in, dedicated, and expanded funding.

4) Water Conservation should be improved and expanded. Improved and expanded conservation efforts – including amplifying federal conservation programs in Kansas – will broaden the positive impacts for addressing Kansas' water challenges. Water conservation should also be considered a 'beneficial use' of water.

**Audubon of Kansas defends wildlife and habitat through
Advocacy • Conservation • Education**

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5) Agricultural use of water needs to be lessened through infrastructural upgrades and modified farming practices.

Agriculture has the biggest impact on Kansas' water future. Kansas farmers should be encouraged to undertake farming practices that will accelerate efforts to improve soil health, reduce nutrient runoff, and optimize use of irrigation water and chemicals. Groundwater Management District 4 (GMD4) in northwest Kansas has received national recognition by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. GMD4 took a dramatic step of reducing the amount of water farmers can use to irrigate their crops by 20%¹. After 5 years, the project was so successful that it was renewed for another 5 years. This management district's dedication to working with producers to determine *how* they were going to make the change, and not *if* they were going to make the change, is a model for success that should be expanded throughout Kansas. Efforts to use more of the state's limited water resources to produce more healthy foods for local consumption should also be undertaken.

6) The water plan fails to address climate change. While this State Water Plan necessarily acknowledges the impact of extreme weather on Kansas' water, it falls short of meaningfully urging the State to dramatically curb greenhouse gases to address human-caused Climate Change.

7) State and local leaders need to demand transparency and accountability. Kansans not only need awareness of Kansas' water resources, but they need the tools and knowledge to act. It is time for State and local leaders to step up to ensure accountability through responsible public policy and funding.

In summary, the water plan as currently drafted continues monitoring water resources and supporting programs that have limited effectiveness. What Kansas needs is a plan that offers solutions to reverse declining water quantity and quality trends. Without bold and decisive action now, we risk losing communities, livelihoods, and our natural resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jacqueline Augustine'.

Jacqueline Augustine
Executive Director
Audubon of Kansas, Inc.

Elizabeth Stoakes
President
Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City

¹ Information from <https://howwerespond.aaas.org/community-spotlight/kansas-farmers-minimize-water-use-as-the-southern-great-plains-become-more-arid/>