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Water Conference Focuses on Implementation and Continued Action

The fifth Governor's Conference on the Future of Water in Kansas is in the books but not without ending on some very inspiring and passionate calls to action. The consistent message throughout the two day event was *The Long Term Vision for the Future of Water Supply in Kansas* recognizes our water problems are complex, there is not a one size fits all approach. While implementation of many action items has begun, the clock is ticking on our water resources without continued aggressive efforts.

"We were able to celebrate significant accomplishments at the conference but we need to accelerate our efforts to prevent nutrients and sedimentation from entering our reservoirs and extending the life of the Ogallala," said Director Tracy Streeter, Kansas Water Office. "For example the amount of water affected by the tools we have in place with the Water Conservation Areas and Local Enhanced Management Areas only represents 2.4 percent of the Ogallala water reach."

David LaFrance, CEO of the American Water Works Association, shared his national perspective, including lessons learned from Flint, Michigan and shared an important message with attendees. "The inevitable reality of water means every drop is a shared resource between all users with multiple purposes and multiple demands placed on it," said LaFrance. "When we as water consumers and users understand each other's challenges no matter where we may live, it only leads to win-win partnerships and solutions versus someone else who doesn't understand determining the solution."

"Every time I attend this conference I am reminded of how lucky Kansas is, from our resources to our data, but it is our job to ensure we are preserving these resources and making the best decisions for our state's future," said Rep. Steven Johnson, District 108. "Not only do we need to continue to engage with the Vision but our actions must also reflect a responsibility for future generations."

Understanding challenges can only be achieved through education of our water issues and local leadership. The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) was present to share a very successful media and outreach campaign they have employed. They found a strong correlation between citizens truly knowing their water source and more efficient water use and conservation.

"It is important to focus on a statewide message that can connect all Kansans to their water supply," said Denise Hickey, NTMWD Water Resource Program and Public Education Manager. "Through our qualitative and quantitative research, we found 87 percent of Texans were willing to conserve if they could cite their water source."

The second day built on the Vision implementation and water policy discussions from the previous day with technical presentation posters and talks including some which directly support items in the Water Vision.

Two breakout sessions featured panelists from both eastern and western Kansas Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), who recently completed action plans to address water issues in each region across the state. Western Kansas RAC members reinforced that the mission statement of the Vision, calling upon us to provide Kansans with the framework, policy and tools to manage a reliable water supply, is in action. Each panelist described the way the various policies and

tools – such as Water Conservation Areas, advanced irrigation technology, and flexible water right management – are aligned to help the RACs achieve their goals.

Another session highlighted findings of an economic impact analysis conducted for three areas in southwest Kansas which indicated reducing water use by 20 percent will positively impact the local economy by two to eight percent for the next 60 years compared to producers pumping at the current rate.

Eastern Kansas RAC members shared goals and plans to address issues such as sedimentation in our reservoirs, which affects available water supply for communities and downstream users. Panelists shared why the action steps proposed will be implemented and not just discussed. The action items have been vetted with many different entities to collaborate and leverage funds, personnel and additional resources, making success even more likely. The action plans for all 14 RACs were on display at the Conference and attendees were encouraged to submit public comment on the plans.

A conference feature that encourages younger Kansans' participation is the graduate and undergraduate student poster contest, sponsored by Westar Energy, where students present their research and are judged. The 2016 first-place poster winners are:

1st Place Undergraduate: Faith Johnson, University of Kansas

- Poster title: Seasonal streamflow predictions for Kansas that utilize a simple large-scale routing scheme that includes reservoir characteristics

1st Place Graduate: Vladimir Karimov, Kansas State University

- Poster title: Reservoirs sedimentation in Central Kansas: Aspect of soil erodibility due to subsurface and surface flows.

As the conference closed, attendees were challenged to come back next year with even more accomplishments and success stories of how Kansas water issues were improved and solved.

“The future is bright if we can be broad and comprehensive with our efforts,” said Rob Manes, Director of The Nature Conservancy-Kansas. “We all depend on it and it’s the character of Kansans to invest in what is important! Let’s all get on board and make our state’s resources a priority.”

The Governor’s Conference on the Future of Water in Kansas is hosted by the Kansas Water Office, K-State /Kansas Water Resource Institute and the Kansas Geological Survey/KU. Major sponsors for the event include Black & Veatch, Burns & McDonnell and Great Lakes Dredge & Dock.

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As the state’s water office, KWO conducts water planning, policy coordination and water marketing as well as facilitates public input throughout the state.

The agency prepares the KANSAS WATER PLAN, a plan for water resources development, management and conservation. KWO also reviews all water laws and makes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for needed legislation.